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UNDER THE SJAMBOK

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A TALE OF THE TRANSVAAL

By GEORGE HANSBY RUSSELL

FOURTH IMPRESSION (FIFTH THOUSAND)

LONDON
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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	I UNDERTAKE A JOURNEY	7
II.	HANS VAN DER MERWE	22
III.	UNFRIENDLY VISITORS	33
IV.	I ENTERTAIN FINE COMPANY	44
V.	A CAPTIVE	54
VI.	THE RULE OF THE SJAMBOK	64
VII.	IN THE TRAIL OF THE WAGGON	72
VIII.	THE BOERS HAVE SPORT	81
IX.	AN ENGLISH GIRL	90
X.	THE MURDER OF VILJOEN	99
XI.	LUCY HANTON	109
XII.	THE RE-APPEARANCE OF DR EVANS	114
XIII.	HANS' CART AND WHAT I FOUND IN IT	122
XIV.	I BUY A HORSE	134
XV.	WOODBUSH VILLAGE	145
XVI.	A TRANSVAAL COURT OF JUSTICE	154
XVII.	IN PRISON	165
XVIII.	THE PLOT THICKENS	174
XIX.	A TEMPLE OF TERPSICHORE	186

CHAP.		PAGE
XX.	BLESSBOK GETS HIS FEED	197
XXI.	A STORM	208
XXII.	THE QUEEN OF THE MAJAJAS	217
XXIII.	A NARROW ESCAPE	228
XXIV.	AMONG THE NATIVES	239
XXV.	THE WITCH-DOCTOR	248
XXVI.	BABIJAN AND HIS BAASIE	258
XXVII.	LONG PIET MAKES CONFESSION	268
XXVIII.	SOLOMON ISAACS, THE GUN-RUNNER	283
XXIX.	LONG PIET LEAVES ME	295
XXX.	A RACE FOR LIFE AND LIBERTY	300
XXXI.	HOW I MEET HALLIMOND	313
XXXII.	I REACH MIDDELBURG	325
XXXIII.	THE WEDDING OF LUCY HANTON	334
XXXIV.	THE CURTAIN FALLS	345

UNDER THE SJAMBOK

CHAPTER I

I UNDERTAKE A JOURNEY

IT is a lovely country of ours, this England, a country that her sons may well be proud of, but from John o' Groat's to Land's End it would be difficult to find more picturesque or romantic scenery than that which lies within the environs of the valley of the Dart. So thought I one bright May morning, as I stood on the lawn of my trim little country house, and gazed upon the scene before me.

To all Englishmen it would have been dear, how much more so to one who, like myself, had been buffeted about for sixteen years under the tropical sun, rain, and storms of South Africa? Not that there are no lovely spots in that distant land, but they lack the peace, security, and quiet of ours, and in my many wanderings, that longed-for feeling of rest was never there; now, however, it appeared to have come at last, for the sabre of the irregular cavalry-man, the

pick of the prospector, and the rifle of the big game sportsman were laid aside, and the quiet *rôle* of the comfortably situated English country gentleman had taken their place.

Yes, there is nothing like a quiet country life after all, and with such scenery, why, what could a man wish for better? The glittering silver streak that formed the Dart; the tree-clad hills covered with light green beech, that rose up almost sheer at places from the water's edge; the rich green meadows on the left, dotted here and there with orchards of plum and apple, whose white blossoms shone like snow in the morning sun, the rough, gaunt, grey church tower that peeped from amidst the trees, the little creeper-covered cottages, the very cattle in the fields—all, all spoke of peace, contentment, and quiet. This is the country for me, I thought, no more wanderings, but rest, rest, rest, and, knocking the ashes from my pipe, I turned towards the comfortable dwelling that owned me as master.

It was a nice old-fashioned place, and had come to me quite unexpectedly, for, as a younger son, I had been sent to South Africa to carve out a fortune for myself. What with gold and diamond digging, speculating, up-country trading and big-game shooting, I had succeeded in amassing a small pile, and I had just formed the intention to return to the old country and visit my family, when a cablegram informed me that my father had passed away: within a month he had been followed to the little churchyard by my two brothers. "Influenza," the local doctor said; however, be that as it may, it placed me in the position of owner

and master of Westbrook, the house I have already referred to.

My youngest sister, a girl of about twenty, and an old aunt formed the rest of the family circle, and, after my rough, adventurous life, the contrast of finding myself every day in the society of two refined women can be more easily understood than described. All I can say is that I was perfectly happy with my lot, and made a firm resolve to "go no more a-roving," as Jack Tar says, but to remain quiet and snug in dock. But, "man proposes, and God disposes," and this is how it fell about.

May is a time when most people go to town, and like most people I went there too, not that I could see any sense in leaving the fresh, pure country air at the very time when Nature seems to burst into new life, but, there were others to consider, and so I went to town.

One fine afternoon I was hurrying down Piccadilly, when a man caught me by the sleeve.

"Are you George Leigh?" he asked.

"That is my name," I replied, "but I fail to recognise you. Where have we met before?"

"So you do not know me, George—do not know your old schoolfellow?" He spoke sadly, and a wan expression passed over his pinched, white face. "You do not remember Richard Hanton?"

"Dick Hanton!" I said aghast, as I looked at the emaciated form before me. Handsome Dick Hanton! What a change! I could hardly believe it, and yet, now I recognised the clear, blue eye, I knew that it

was he. It was a warm day, but for all that he wore an overcoat, and a huge muffler was round his neck, and as I took his hand it was like that of a dead man, so thin and wasted.

"Good gracious, Dick!" I said, "what have you been doing to look like this?"

"Ah! I thought you would know me," he said, and his face lit up as again he pressed my hand. "I have been very ill, old chap, very ill, and the doctors say I am not out of the wood yet. I got a bad attack of low fever when I was in the States, and then had influenza on top of it when I returned here. In fact, I am no longer the Samson I used to be," and he gave a smile at old recollections, for that had been his nickname at school. "I often wrote to you, George, but I suppose you did not receive my letters; I know you did not receive all of them, as some were returned through the Dead Letter Office. At times I thought you had gone the way of the great majority; but you do look well!" he went on, patting me on the shoulder; then, changing his voice, he said earnestly: "George, I want to have a chat with you, you must come and dine with me. I wrote to you about a matter, but it is evident you did not get my letter, though that one was not returned. However, I will not trouble you now; come to-morrow, old boy, say you will, here is my address," and he slipped a card into my hand.

"I will come, Dick," I answered.

"At seven o'clock," he said. "Now, good-bye, old chap," and he pressed my hand, and started slowly on his way. He turned back a second later, and I heard

him call after me. "Mind you come," was all he said, but it was in such an earnest manner, more like pleading than asking.

"Poor old fellow!" I thought, "he is in low spirits;" and my mind carried me back some twenty years, when there was not a blither lad in the whole country of Herefordshire than Dick Hanton, the young squire of Selton. I wondered whether he had had losses, for in the days of our boyhood he was heir to a good fortune, but from what I remembered of him, he was not one to be worried in that way. That he was worried, besides being very ill, I could tell, and I speculated on what it could be.

The next day, a quarter of an hour before the appointed time, I arrived at the address given me. To my inquiries for Dick I was told that he had been suddenly taken dangerously ill, that his lawyer and doctor were at that moment in the dining-room, and expecting me.

Two gentlemen were standing near the mantelpiece talking to one another when I entered the room. They both looked up, and one, a little dapper man with a smooth, shiny head, keen grey eyes, and aquiline nose, ornamented by a pair of gold pince-nez, came quickly towards me.

"You are Mr Leigh—George Leigh?" he said, looking at me inquiringly. I bowed my head.

"I thought so," he continued. "I knew your father well. My name is Harper, Frederick Harper, and we have been family solicitors to the Hantons for the last three generations—but permit me to introduce you to

Dr Evans." The doctor, a tall, thin, hungry-looking man, slightly inclined his head.

"How is your patient, doctor?" I asked.

He did not answer for a few moments, then said with a supercilious air: "I have known people worse, and others better, but, but"—then turning to his companion —"don't you think we had better have dinner?"

I could hardly restrain expressing my indignation at the cool manner of the medical attendant. We had barely finished our meal when a bell rang.

"Ah!" said the doctor, "we must go, he is awake. Now, Mr Leigh, I must caution you not to allow the patient to excite himself; if he does so, you must leave the room." I did not answer, but, preceded by the doctor and solicitor, followed them to the sick room.

"Is George there—George Leigh?" said a low, weak voice.

"Yes, here I am, Dick," I answered, as I approached the bed.

"Thank God that you have come!" he exclaimed, as he took my hand and pressed it. But what a change had been wrought even in the short time since we had last met. I had seen death too often not to know its hand. I no longer required any information from the doctor, for I knew that Richard Hanton's days were numbered, and that he would never see the light of another. He read my thoughts as he gazed in my face.

"Yes, I know, old chap, the time is short. God grant I may have another couple of hours, and then I shall die in peace. Harper," he said to the lawyer, "I want you to remain here. Will you excuse me, doctor?" he went

on, "I want a private conversation with Mr Leigh and Mr Harper."

The doctor demurred. "You are not in a fit state to stand any excitement," he said.

"Why quibble like this, man?" said Hanton, almost fiercely. "You know my hours are numbered. I must once more ask you to leave the room." For a moment the medical man looked at us, then turned slowly towards the door—I did not hear him close it, as Dick had already seized my hand. New energy seemed to have possessed him, and in an almost firm voice he plunged at once into his subject.

I now learnt for the first time that, some two years after we had last met, Dick had married the daughter of a rich American cotton planter. Her name was Lucy Eyre. She had been promised by her father to a dissolute young scamp, the son of a wealthy neighbour, it being the wish of both parents that in the course of time their properties should be combined. In spite of Lucy's earnest entreaties that this young reprobate should not be forced upon her, her father remained obdurate. At last her health broke down, and by the peremptory orders of the doctor she was sent away for a change.

Accompanied by her father she went to Yorkville, and it was there that Dick met her. In a very short space of time a slight friendship warmed into a deep attachment on both sides. Dick, who was in very comfortable circumstances, with Miss Eyre's consent asked her father for his daughter's hand. The cotton king not only refused in a most insulting manner, but threatened if he ever entered his apartment again that

he would pitch him out of the window, and as a parting shot yelled after him that he intended to take his daughter away next day, ill or not ill, and within a week to marry her to the man of his choice.

Lucy had heard all. At daylight the next morning the lovers eloped, and before ten o'clock of the same day were duly married by the pastor of a small village some twenty miles off. Hardly had they left the church when Dick's new father-in-law arrived upon the scene, and rushed upon his daughter, but Dick's strong arm shook him off as if he had been a rat, at the same time telling him that his daughter was no longer Lucy Eyre, but Lucy Hanton, his wife. Old Eyre departed, cursing them both, and swearing that not a cent of his money should she ever touch. Although she wrote to her father repeatedly, her letters were returned unanswered.

Dick and Lucy travelled about the States, and on one occasion came across an old acquaintance of Mrs Hanton, a solicitor, who also was on his honeymoon. It was from him that they learnt for the first time that Mrs Hanton was heiress to a considerable fortune, which had been left to her at the death of her mother, many years before, but of which up to that moment she had been kept completely ignorant.

Dick had made up his mind to look into his wife's affairs, but just at that time their little girl was born, and the day of her birth was the last for his dear wife, for she died in child-birth. Almost distracted with grief, he had the infant baptised Lucy, handed her, under her mother's name of Eyre, over to some honest poor

people, a widow named Schneider, and her son, and giving them a considerable sum of money down, agreed to pay a yearly stipend for the child's maintenance and schooling. He then turned his back on America, with the fixed intention of never returning there again, or ever seeing the being who had deprived him of the one he had held dearest upon earth.

Dick returned home, but not a single word of all this did he tell to any one except Harper, through whom the payments were made. For some years Hanton wandered about the world, always avoiding the United States, but when in Jamaica, a craving came over him to see once more the place where he had laid his wife to rest, and for the first time in all those years he became conscious that it was his duty to seek out and bring up his daughter in a manner befitting her proper station in life.

Proceeding to the States, he found that the people in whose care he had left his child, had gone to South Africa some eight years back, taking his daughter with them.

Returning immediately to London, he ascertained from Harper that it was quite true his daughter had been in South Africa for the last eight years, that she had been put to the convent school of Pretoria, where she had received a most liberal education, and from information that Harper had recently received from the Cape solicitor who transacted his business, as the widow Schneider was dead, Hanton's daughter was now the ward of a certain Hans Van der Merwe, an up-country farmer, whose wife was a most kind, considerate person.

These people received an annual income of one hundred and fifty pounds for her keep, and in due course there was every hope that she would marry and settle down in the country of her adoption.

He learnt all this for the first time then, as he had expressly requested that her name should never be mentioned to him, and all that was necessary for her keep and schooling was arranged by Harper, without any reference whatsoever to himself.

Dick made hasty preparations to go to South Africa, and was on the point of sailing, when a violent attack of influenza seized him, and kept him to his bed. Already weakened by many attacks of malarial fever contracted in different parts of the world, the doctors would not hear of his going on so hazardous an expedition.

It was then that he thought of me, and wrote three or four times, but his letters were returned. At last he heard that I had been in Middelburg, but forgot who told him. He wrote to me there, and sent his letter to the care of the chief magistrate, or landrost, as he is called, and to avoid losing time had given me in that letter a few particulars about his daughter's fortune, and what she might expect. That letter never reached me, but was never returned to Dick. In it he had asked me to act as a father to his daughter should I find her, to bring her home to him, and to look after her if he were dead.

He had in that letter enclosed a cheque for £500 to pay any expenses that might have been incurred on my part, not knowing of my ample means.

Pressing my hand, he asked me, nay, implored me, to

seek his daughter for him, and to be her protector, her guardian, until perhaps some day she met a fitting husband.

He did not enter into the details of her possessions, saying that Harper would do that, but told me she would get all her mother's fortune, which amounted to one hundred thousand dollars, and at his death would also be heiress to a large sum, for he had lived with great frugality. The property in Herefordshire, however, being entailed, would go to the next male heir-at-law, a distant cousin, who had gone to South Africa some six years before, but whom he had never seen. I asked him his cousin's name, but a fit of coughing interrupted his reply, and I forgot to put the question again.

In a few moments he opened his eyes and looked at me. "George," he said faintly, "will you do this for me?"

"Yes, I will do it," I replied earnestly, taking his hand.

"Thank God!" he said, returning my pressure, then he closed his eyes, and sank into a sleep—but it was that eternal sleep from which no man ever wakes in this world—for his soul had gone to join his Lucy.

"I told you the excitement would be too much for him," said a voice just behind us, and looking round —there stood Dr Evans.

Neither Harper or I had heard him re-enter the room, for our attention had been riveted on the words of the dying man, and the door was almost covered by a large screen. I did not answer the doctor, but it struck me

that he had been eavesdropping, and my dislike to him increased. I plucked Harper by the sleeve as a sign that I wanted him, and returned with him to the dining-room.

"How did poor Dick come to have such a strange medical man?" were my first words.

"He is not his usual medical man," said the solicitor, "but the assistant. Old Dr Russell had been called away to the country, and so Evans came."

"How often has this man been here, do you know?"

"I really do not," was the reply, "but I think he has been here two or three times."

We sat down and talked for about half an hour over preliminaries and arrangements about poor Dick, as it had been his express wish that he should be buried by the side of his wife, in the little American village. We were on the point of taking our departure, when Dr Evans entered the room.

"Ah! Mr Harper," he said, without even looking at me, "I think you left this paper upstairs. I found it on the floor," and he handed him a long sheet of foolscap. The solicitor took it, and reddened.

"Thank you, doctor," he said; "and now, Mr Leigh, as we are both going the same way, we had better go together, so come along," and he took my arm, at the same time giving it a slight pressure, which I understood to imply that he wanted my company for some special reason.

"It is strange," he said, "but I could have sworn I put that paper in my bag."

"Where did you put the bag?" I asked.

"It was on a chair near the bedroom door."

"Is the paper of much importance?"

"Well, in one way it is, for it is a list of the different properties, etc., that Miss Eyre, I mean Hanton, for she must in future be known by that name, is heiress to."

"I should like to go back to the room for a few minutes," I said, "will you come?"

"Most assuredly," he answered.

We re-entered the house, and went straight to the bedroom. The doctor had gone, and the woman who had been sent for had arrived. On the table near the window were some sheets of foolscap paper.

"Have you used any half sheets?" I asked Harper.

"No," was his reply.

"Then somebody else has been using them for you, and left his silver pencil-case behind, besides," I said, as I took it up.

Harper did not reply, but put the pencil-case into his pocket, and shortly after we left the house, both going separate ways.

The next few days after this sad event, put me in possession of full particulars in reference to the undertaking I had given my word to attempt—that of finding poor Dick's daughter, bringing her to England, and looking after her until she married.

It was with feelings of great surprise, not unmingled with compunction, that I heard from Harper that by the will of his client I was to receive the generous legacy of five thousand pounds, and a further sum of five hundred pounds, with which to prosecute my search. Finally, armed with all necessary documents,

legal and otherwise, I had, within ten days of the death of poor Dick Hanton, taken my passage on a Castle Liner for South Africa to find his daughter.

I duly arrived in Capetown, presented my letter of introduction to the solicitor with whom Harper had been in communication, and learnt from him that Hans Van der Merwe, at whose house Lucy Hanton was residing, lived in the Woodbush village in the Majaja country; that, knowing something of his wife's relations, who belonged to a very respectable Cape family, and from different communications he had received from Van der Merwe himself, their culture appeared to be far above that of the average up-country Boer; and this had decided his choice.

"It is rather an out-of-the-way place," he said, "but if you go through Middelburg, they will be able to tell you all about him, as I believe he often visits the village. His letters are generally directed from it, and I always send his remittances there. I suppose," he added, "some compensation will be made to the man for such a sudden loss in his income?" I assured him there would be no trouble about that.

Strange, I thought, that I had not met Van der Merwe in Middelburg, as I knew the village well; but thither I directed my steps, and *en route*, had my papers viséd by the British resident in Pretoria.

When in Middelburg I called upon the Landrost, to make inquiries about the missing letter containing the cheque, but he was away on tour, and I did not see him.

I made inquiries about Hans Van der Merwe, and most of the information I collected was somewhat at

variance with what I had expected, and certainly not very flattering to the character of that individual; however, like other small places, Middelburg abounds in gossips, and after all, for a Boer, he might be a very good sort of fellow; so, having equipped myself with all that was necessary for a long waggon journey, I pushed on for the Woodbush village.

CHAPTER II

HANS VAN DER MERWE

"KEEP well to the right when you cross the drift,[1] there are two deep holes on the left, and Hans Van der Merwe almost lost an ox there last week."

"Did you say Hans Van der Merwe?" I asked of the stranger, a bronzed thick-set man, with a grizzly beard, aquiline nose, and dark piercing eyes.

"Yes, Hans Van der Merwe," he replied, as he stroked the glossy mane of the stout, hardy-looking beast on which he was astride; "do you know him?" he continued, as he looked at me with his sharp keen eyes.

I was on the point of unburdening myself, and telling him of what I knew of Hans Van der Merwe, but I checked myself, and answered in an off-hand way:

"I have heard of him."

"Ah!" he said, "but you have never met him?"

"No," I replied, "I have not."

"Well!" said my companion, "I must be getting on," and without another word he touched his horse's side with his heel.

"Hambarkai!" (Go on) I shouted to my native driver and "voorlooper."

"Yaiks! yaiks!" yelled the former, crack crack, crack

[1] Ford.

went the great whip, and the heavy ponderous waggon with its team of sixteen hardy little Zulu oxen, creaked and groaned as it rumbled and jolted over the apology for a road, that gently sloped to the banks of the Groote Olifants river.

As I trudged along behind in readiness at any moment to use the screw-brake, I could not help feasting my eyes on the lovely scenery that lay before me. Only the day before yesterday I had left the little town of Middelburg, with its large, white church, its funny, old-fashioned houses and comparatively flat, treeless surrounding country. Here huge monsters of the forest rose up on all sides, beautiful glades and parks that only required the old-fashioned Elizabethan house, to make one imagine oneself in the far-away Old Country, and every now and then, the shimmer and glitter of the Olifants river would flash through some open spot, as, under the rays of the evening sun, it glided away to pour itself into the mighty Limpopo and thence to the Indian Ocean.

What a lovely country! I thought to myself; what prospects are there not here for future generations! but at present its sole occupants consist of a few rude, ignorant, uncouth Boers, or the descendants of the once mighty Zulu chief Maleuw. Here the lion roams unmolested, monkeys chatter and dart from tree to tree; the deadly black and green mamba[1] twist and twirl their glittering shapes, and the mighty boa-constrictor is not at all uncommon. But there are worse things to face than lions and snakes.

[1] Poisonous snakes of great size.

"Hamba gashli, Inkoss!" (Go easy, sir) yelled Basket, my native driver. I sprang to the brake; half a dozen sharp turns, and a second later, the heavy waggon with its wheels locked, was sliding down the steep bank into the river; bump, bump, bump it went from stone to stone; I leapt in behind, and in a second had untwisted the brake-handle.

"Keep to the left," I yelled to the voorlooper, who was now walking chest deep at the head of the oxen, when it flashed across me I had been told to keep to the right. It was too late to turn, my heart was in my mouth; every second I expected to feel the waggon overturning, but no, the boy was already getting in shoaler water, it was only knee-deep now; a few more strains and tugs, and already half the span had crossed, and were toiling up the bank on the opposite side; another half minute and the heavy waggon had crossed the river, and we were safe on the opposite bank.

I was certain the stranger had said, "Keep to the right." As we topped the bank I looked back across the broad stream; I rubbed my eyes—no, I could not have been mistaken, I was certain I saw the stranger—he was still seated on his horse; both stood out sharp and clear in the light of the setting sun; I only saw them for a second, then horse and rider disappeared behind a clump of bush, and though I strained my sight to its utmost, I saw nothing more of them.

How was it they were still so near? The man had left me at a swinging canter that ought to have put three or four miles between us, but there he was I was quite certain of it, not five hundred yards away. Perhaps he

had come back to see that I met with no accident, and I felt a sort of kindly feeling for my late companion, that he should have put himself out so much for a total stranger.

What a peaceful scene it was as I lay in the cartel at the back of my waggon, having my last pipe before turning in for the night. The moon had risen, and I saw her bright reflection in the clear, cool waters below me, for we had made our camping ground on the bank of the broad river, not a hundred paces from the drift we had crossed at sundown. The tall, majestic trees on the opposite bank stood out as plain and clear as in daylight. Far away on the right I could make out the sharp peak of Maleuw's Kop. It was but a few years ago, that the base and sides of that great, silent sentinel were alive with hundreds of human beings, but now the ruined kraals and schanses were the abodes of innumerable serpents, monkeys, and birds of many-coloured plumage. The roar of the lion, and sharp yelp of the jackal echoed and re-echoed from the lovely valleys and glens that lay at its feet.

The once mighty and powerful tribe of which Maleuw was the dreaded chief, had fallen in one day; hardly a soul escaped; men, women, and children, all fell beneath the assegai and battle-axe of the Swazies, and the bullets of their Boer supporters. No wonder the river running near its base, and within only a short distance from where I was camped, was known as the Blood River. More than one old Boer who remembers that great fight says that it ran red for days.

Well! they had nearly all gone; the few scattered remnants of the once powerful tribe were the descen-

dants of those who owed their existence to the lucky fact that they had been sent out on a big hunting trip, and were not with their people when the great slaughter took place.

"It's lucky for me that things are more peaceful now," I thought to myself, as I knocked out my pipe, pulled down the waggon sail, and turned over on my side to go to sleep. For a little time I could catch the low murmur of the two natives as they spoke in subdued tones from their sleeping-place beneath my waggon; the munch, munch, munch of the oxen as they chewed the cud, seemed to get more and more distant, and I fell asleep.

To one who has lived much amongst it, a sense of danger almost becomes instinct. I awoke suddenly, and instinctively stretched out my hand for my revolver. A second later there was a shrill cry of pain. It was from my voorlooper, January.

A hurried shuffling sound of several footsteps grew fainter and fainter. In a second, revolver in hand, I was on my feet. I pushed the waggon sail aside, and jumped to the ground. It was pitch dark, the moon had disappeared, and that inky darkness, the time when the Zulu, Matabele, in fact all South African tribes, choose for their time of attack, was upon us—the hour before dawn.

A faint moan brought me to my senses, and I hurriedly approached the direction from whence it came. To my surprise, it was some thirty yards to the right of my waggon, and within twenty of a thick clump of bush.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" I asked.

"Manzi! manzi!" (water! water!) came the faint reply.

I darted to the waggon, lit the lantern, and hurried back with a pannikin of water to the sufferer. He drank it eagerly, and then, by the light of the horn lantern, I made an examination of the prostrate form. A short-bladed stabbing assegai had passed through his right side, and was literally pinning him to the ground, a deep red stream was pouring from the wound, and at a glance I realised it was only the question of a few seconds more, and then all would be over.

"Where is Basket?" I asked.

"Hambili" (gone), came the faint reply; then, suddenly, beckoning me to come close to him, I caught the words "Mulungu" (white man), and "Hache" (horse), and with a quiver of the whole frame, and a deep sigh, the spirit of January passed away to the shadow-land and happy hunting-ground of his savage forefathers. Thoroughly satisfied that he was beyond all help, I tried to withdraw the murderous weapon, but this could only be done by holding it by the blade, and drawing the whole shaft through.

Ah! I thought, this may give some clue, for it was not the shape of the ordinary assegai as used by the natives in those parts. The early dawn found me washing the blood-stained weapon in the Groote Olifants river; and before the semi-tropical sun shot out in all its splendour from behind the mighty peak of Maleuw's Kop, my pick and shovel had been at work, and poor January was laid to rest in the soil of his native land.

I was now in an awkward fix. My voorlooper was dead; Basket, my driver, had gone; and the whole duty of attending to sixteen oxen and driving the huge, lumbering waggon over an almost impassable road would devolve on me. To make matters worse, I was seventy miles from Middelburg, and, as far as I knew, thirty from the nearest Boer homestead; however, the cattle must feed, so I walked towards them to let them loose. They were still contentedly lying down, blinking their eyes at the sun, and chewing the cud; but where were my two little front oxen on which I prided myself so much? They too, like Basket, had gone, and I cursed my luck to think that I had had such a villain in my service, for now it was quite clear Basket must have murdered January, and then gone off with the oxen. As I turned to let go the next two oxen from the trek-tow,[1] my foot kicked against something; it was an ordinary red lead-pencil; it certainly was not mine; I had not possessed one for years; Basket could not write, I knew, then how did it come there, and to whom could it belong? I put the pencil into my pocket, let the oxen go to grass, and after lighting a fire, made some coffee, had breakfast, then filling my pipe, sat down under the cool shade of the waggon to think.

Thinking must have given place to sleeping, for I suddenly became conscious that the sun had moved round, and that if I wanted to get to the shade I should have to go to the opposite side of the waggon. Every now and then I could catch the tinkle tinkle of

[1] Long chain or rope by which the waggon is drawn.

the bell hung round the neck of one of my oxen, and knew that the rest of the herd could not be far away. Springing to my feet, I was on my way to count them, when I heard the sound of a native singing, and an instant later caught sight of him, hurrying along at the usual Kafir jog-trot, in the direction of the drift.

Except for the ordinary Kafir mouchi,[1] he wore no clothing, and I could see that he was a mompara.[2] In his hand, besides the two sticks that no native would ever dream of travelling without, he carried a long white bamboo, in a slit at the end of which was a letter, and I knew at once that he was a messenger.

"Izapa wena" (come here, you) I shouted.

For an instant he stood still, and seemed to be looking all around to see where the voice had come from. Whether he had seen me or not before, I know not, but a second shout apprised him of my whereabouts, and he turned and came slowly towards me. When he had come to within about ten yards of where I stood, he put his arm up in the air, with the fingers pointed heavenwards, and shouted: "Sakabona, Inkoss" (I greet you, chief). Then he stood still to listen to what I had to say.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Middelburg, Inkoss," came the laconic reply.

"Who is your master, and where does he live?"

"The Groote Baas Hans Van der Merwe, and he lives near the Woodbush village."

[1] Some calico or skins hung round the loins.

[2] Raw savage.

"But you are many days' journey from there. When did you leave him, and where is your pass?"[1]

"It is here," he answered, as he opened a small pouch that hung at his side. It was the ordinary Kafir pass. It was signed by Hans Van der Merwe, and the signature stood out in a bold handwriting, in red lead-pencil. The date was but yesterday.

"I thought Hans Van der Merwe was at the Woodbush village!" I said, "that is one hundred and fifty miles from here, and yet your pass is dated yesterday?"

The man made no reply.

"Now, look here," I said, as I took a sovereign out of my pocket, and held it up, "do you see that?"

His face positively beamed, and he grinned from ear to ear, for what native from the Cape to the Zambesi does not know what an English sovereign looks like?

"Very well," I went on, "if you take a letter to Middelburg for me, and bring me an answer, you shall have that. Stay, there are five shillings for you now; will you do it?"

"Inkoss! inkoss!" he shouted, as he once more lifted his arm above his head, and then eagerly stretched out both hands for the proffered gift; for it is not Kafir etiquette to take anything with one hand from a superior, either white or black.

"Inkoss, I will take the letter, and bring the answer, but should you meet the Groote Baas, my master, you must not tell him."

In less than half an hour I had written two letters,

[1] No native in the Transvaal is allowed to travel without a pass, and any white man has the right of demanding to see it.

one to the Landrost [1] of Middelburg, and one to my friend, Will Hallimond, on whom I could rely, telling them both of what had happened, the plight I was in, and asking for immediate assistance.

"Hand me your stick to put them in," I said, seeing that he was about to remove the letter it already held. He passed it over to me; I glanced at the address on the letter. It ran as follows:—

"DEN HEER HENRI DE KOCK,
Auctioneer and Poundmaster,
Middelburg."

"Have you been to Middelburg before?" I asked, "and do you know the English Baas that keeps the big canteen there?"

"I have been there, I know the mafuta (fat man) of the canteen, I have eaten in his yard."

"Then take these letters to him." I scribbled a short note to the ruddy, good-natured landlord of the Standard Hotel, and asked him to deliver them. Wrapping the note and the two letters in an old piece of newspaper, I changed my mind about putting them in the cleft of the stick, and saw that the man had them securely fastened underneath his mouchi.

"What is your name?"

"Kechima" (the man that runs).

"Then hurry."

"Before three suns have set I shall have returned. I go by the short path across the mountains," and without another word he turned his head once more towards the drift. As he crossed it, I noticed that he carefully

[1] Magistrate.

avoided the side the stranger had told me to be sure to take; I saw him mount the opposite bank, and for some time after he disappeared from view, heard the monotonous chant he kept up, as he swung along.

Three days! I thought to myself, what a lot could be done in three days; but it would be madness to proceed alone, so I should have to stay where I was, and grin and bear it.

CHAPTER III

UNFRIENDLY VISITORS

LONG shadows were already beginning to fall across the ground, and the afternoon of another day was drawing to a close. I no longer had a herdsman, so had to do duty myself. I soon found the cattle—the rich rhinoceros-grass that grew near the river was too tempting and sweet for them to stray far—and after driving them gently back, and giving them their evening drink at the drift, I tied each of them by their reims (long leather thongs that pass under the horns) to the trek-tow.

The short twilight glided into night, and again the glorious moon was shining down upon us, making everything almost as light as day. I stirred up the dying embers of my fire, put my little kettle on, and soon made a good meal on a tin of sardines, some hard ship's-biscuits, and boiling hot coffee; then lighting my pipe, I lay on the grass near the fire, and thought of all that had happened that day. Something seemed to be telling me not to sleep in the waggon that night; I am not superstitious, but do what I would, I could not shake off the thought.

It would not be the first time I had slept on the

veldt by many a hundred. It was a lovely night, no dew was falling, so I determined to humour the recurring thought. Suiting the action to the desire, I soon had a snug little bed made out of a good sheep-skin kaross and a few blankets, and lay down close to the clump of bush near which poor January had come to his untimely end.

I had left the candle burning in the swinging lantern in my waggon; it is a pity to waste candles, I thought, and went and put it out. As I got into the waggon, I accidentally touched my rifle.

At any other time I should not have dreamt of taking it out of the waggon, but again that something seemed to tell me to do so. I accordingly slipped my bandolier of cartridges over my head, put my revolver in my coat pocket, and, taking my sporting Martini-Henry in my hand, went back to my bed.

I did not feel the least drowsy—my long sleep in the middle of the day might easily account for that; in fact I was very wide awake. I lay at full length on my stomach, with my arms folded under my breast, my eyes gazing in the direction of the drift, the only route from which I might reasonably expect any help to come; but I could hope for little for the next two and a half to three days, and as I puffed on at the Boer tobacco I was smoking (the bowl of the pipe being covered by a metal top to prevent this light weed from flying, and thus obscuring any glow that might show from it), I thought of the many strange episodes my wild adventurous life had led me through, and wondered what would be the outcome of this one.

The moon went slowly and majestically towards her

setting, and the shadows grew longer and longer, and made my resting-place darker and darker. Strange weird sounds came from the surrounding forest; they mingled with that of the ever-rolling, gurgling hum of the mighty river. Every now and then I caught the sharp yelp of some prowling jackal, and once, though at a great distance, the unmistakable roar of the king of beasts. My oxen heard it too, for some of them rose from their kneeling position and tugged at their reims, but they soon lay down again. The great, lumbering, white-tented waggon still stood out sharp and clear, and I speculated how long it would be before it too would pass into the shadow of my resting-place.

Hark! what was that? Could it be a hippopotamus sporting in the water near the drift? I certainly heard a slight splash, and then another, but they were not accompanied by the deep breath the great beast always takes when rising to the surface. I was about to rise and reconnoitre, when I heard another sound, that of a breaking twig, and this not thirty paces from me. It came from my right. Again I heard a twig break, and then another and another.

Something or somebody was stealthily creeping through the clump of bush beside which I was lying. Except that my hand stole noiselessly to my pocket, where I clutched my revolver, I lay perfectly still. In less than a minute a figure stood within twenty paces of me; I could make it out quite distinctly; then it dropped on its hands and knees, and began wriggling across the short grass in the direction of my two front oxen. I was in the act of springing upon it, when, chancing to

glance once more in the direction of the drift, which was still in the full light of the moon, I saw three other figures going through similar antics, and as they crept closer and closer to the end of the waggon, where, if it had not been for my strange superstition, I should have been fast asleep, I caught the glitter of their assegai blades as the moon shone full upon them.

When they arrived within a couple of yards of the waggon they stood up; two went on each side of the hind wheels, their assegais raised above their heads, whilst the third stepped back a few paces and began shouting, "Baas! Baas!" It was evident that I was expected to leap out of the waggon, and the next instant their assegais would be plunged into me. What treachery! I thought. In a second my rifle was in my hand. Quick as lightning I slipped in a cartridge and took deliberate aim at the nearest man, when there was a mighty crashing through the bushes, a terrific roar, and some huge form passed within twenty yards of my hiding-place. It bounded across the open space direct for my oxen. The man I had first seen had jumped to his feet. For a second only the savage beast seemed to be upon him, and he fell to the ground; then I heard a shrill cry of pain from one of my oxen, and, almost before I could realise what had happened, the great African lion had disappeared, taking with it the ox, and thus diminishing my span by one more beast. The three men had also disappeared, and I was pretty confident they would not trouble me again that night, for when there is a lion in the question the native is an arrant cur.

My oxen were plunging madly; two of them had already broken their reims and were making for the drift; however, I managed to intercept them and drive them back. I now turned my attention to the first intruder who was lying in the same position as when struck down by the lion. Blood was streaming from two deep gashes in his shoulder, and at first I thought he was dead, but on touching him a groan assured me that life was not extinct, so taking the assegai, which he still clutched, out of his hand, I put it in the waggon, and returning with some water and an old shirt, I washed and bandaged the wounds; then I padlocked the end of the brake chain round one of his ankles, and the other end to the trek-tow, and throwing a blanket over him, I left my prisoner, feeling that he was quite secure till the morning.

Thoroughly wearied with all my exertions, how gladly would I have turned in, but with the possibility of the return of these marauders it was simply out of the question while the night lasted; so I sat by my fire, and kept myself awake by making and drinking coffee. At last the sky grew light in the east, and the early dawn passed into day almost as quickly as day does into night in these latitudes. I returned, and had one more look at my prisoner; he had recovered his senses, so giving him a pannikin of water, I re-covered him with the blanket, then turning my oxen to grass, put my bedding into the waggon, jumped in, and in less than ten minutes was fast asleep.

It was barely six when I turned in, but it was past two in the afternoon when I awoke. The close tented

waggon was intensely hot. I pushed back the sail and looked out. The bright light almost dazzled me, and the sun was blazing down. This place is too hot for this time of the day, I thought, and jumped down to get under the waggon, where on the hottest days it is always cool, and a faint breeze seems to be blowing. I had forgotten all about my prisoner until I saw him sitting in the exact position I had left him in. He had thrown the blanket over his back, and was looking moodily before him.

"Hallo!" I shouted. "So you are alive yet?" I thought it better to be as severe as possible at first, though I felt somewhat sorry for him, as the wounds must have given him a good deal of pain. He did not show the least sign that he heard me.

"Come under the waggon in the shade," I said, when I remembered the chain, and walked towards him to set him free. As I got up to him, he cowered down on the ground.

"The Baas will not strike me?" he asked.

"No," I replied, as I undid the padlock, "I will not strike you. Get up and go under the waggon."

He rose with some difficulty and went where I had told him. I had another good look at the injured shoulder and re-dressed it; as I did so, I could not help noticing that his back was literally covered with stripes.

"How is it that your back is in this state?" I asked.

"The sjambok" (a whip made of hippopotamus or rhinoceros hide, greatly used by Boers) was his reply.

"Where is your pass, and who is your master?" I continued.

A small skin wallet was hanging at his side; he fumbled in it for a few seconds, then took out a greasy piece of paper. On it was written in Dutch, and in the same handwriting I had seen before: "Sell the fourteen at Standerton." It was not signed, nor was there any address on it.

"This is not your pass," I said. The man seemed frightened when I told him.

"Come," I went on, "give me your wallet, and I will look for myself."

He reluctantly passed it across to me. It was only an old monkey skin, like many a dozen I had seen before. A few dried leaves of dakah (Indian hemp) and the pass were all it contained. This pass, like that of Kechima's, was signed by Hans Van der Merwe, but no longer in red lead pencil.

"Now, Masoja," I said, for I had seen his name on his pass, "I see that Baas Van der Merwe is your Baas; then, why would you steal my oxen? Does not Baas Hans provide for his people?"

A strange smile came over the man's face, but he did not reply.

"To whom are you to give that little letter?" I asked, as I held the first bit of paper he had handed me towards him. He looked uneasy and shuffled his feet, but made no reply.

"Very good," I said, "remember you are my prisoner; if you try to get away, I shall shoot you." Here I took my revolver out of my pocket and fired a shot, to show him what it could do. He looked scared, but the only answer he gave me was:

"The sjambok is heavy, and the arm of the Groote Baas Hans is strong."

I saw it was no use for the present to try and get any information out of him, so giving him a couple of ship's biscuits and half a tin of corned beef I left him to his own devices.

Taking my axe, I went out some little distance into the bush and cut a dozen or so good stout saplings. These I fixed firmly in the ground round the fore part of my waggon, where the oxen were tied up at night. I next cut some heavy boughs and interlaced them between the stakes, forming a rough kind of cattle kraal; it might be of some small assistance in case of another visit of the lion.

By this time the sun was again on the wane, so I started out in search of my oxen. They were further off than the previous day, and it was some time before I returned. As I approached the waggon I could see no sign of Masoja, he had disappeared. "Well!" I thought, "good riddance to bad rubbish," as I really did not know what to do with him. I watered my oxen, and after putting them into the temporary kraal I had made for them, proceeded to cook my evening meal, when I saw Masoja returning, and with the uninjured arm he was dragging along a huge thorn-bush.

"The lion will come again to-night," he said, "and this will help to keep him from the oxen. The groote Baas must light fires round the waggon."

The man certainly had some gratitude in him. His advice was good, and I wondered I had not thought of it sooner, having done so before in other parts of the

country. In less than an hour six great fires were blazing round the waggon. The oxen seemed to understand that something was being done for their safety, for they did not resent the fires in the least.

Again the moon was overhead, and the hot stifling day had settled down into the stillness and quietude of night. I had arranged with Masoja that he was to sit in the fore part of the waggon and keep watch. At regular intervals he was to replenish the fire with a large stack of dried wood we cut for the purpose, and when the waggon passed into the shade of the clump of bush, which would not be until pretty late, he was to call me, and I was to sit up for the remainder of the night whilst he got his rest. I no longer had any thought of treachery on his part, so I turned in, this time sleeping on my cartel in the waggon; however, I thought it wise to keep my revolver in my pocket, and my rifle at my side, ready for any emergency.

I had a good sound sleep, and it must have been about two o'clock in the morning when Masoja awoke me. He had seen nothing, so after putting fresh fuel on each of the fires, I took up his position at the head of my waggon whilst he retired underneath to sleep. He asked me for his assegai before doing so, and I gave it him.

I sat with my rifle between my knees, puffing slowly at my pipe. The moon gradually disappeared, and the darkness before dawn was upon me. The fires began to burn low, so I got off my seat to put on some more wood. I had just finished piling faggots on the third fire, and was returning with more from the stack of

wood which was outside the circle, when I became aware that two large glittering eyes, that seemed to glow like hot coals, were fixed upon me, and their owner, a huge lion, was crouching in a direct line between me and the waggon. A low growling, snarling sound was coming from his deep chest, and his tail was lashing angrily from side to side. The bundle of faggots fell from my arms, and without a moment's hesitation my rifle was at my shoulder and I had fired. The next instant there was a terrific roar, and the great beast had sprung upon me. As he did so, I held my rifle above my head with both hands, and his massive jaws closed upon it.

His great weight was too much for me,—I felt myself falling back—the next moment I thought would be my last, when, with a cry of rage and pain, he relaxed his hold upon my rifle, and turned savagely towards the waggon. As he did so, I saw Masoja, assegai in hand, fleeing towards it. In spite of his bad shoulder, with the agility of a cat he sprang upon it; a second later, the lion was there too. The man jumped to the ground, but before the infuriated beast could follow, a bullet from my rifle brought him to his knees. His roars vibrated and reverberated, as he lashed his tail with fury; twice he managed to get to his feet, and essayed to leap to the ground, but it was evident my second shot, and the stab he had received from Masoja, had proved fatal, and with one long, wild roar, which seemed to die into a moan, he fell lifeless. There he lay in all his savage grandeur, almost in the identical spot where I had been sitting.

It took some time to quiet the oxen, but we eventually did so, and, as the dawn of day broke, we had dragged the carcase some little distance from the waggon, and Masoja, with the uninjured arm, was busily engaged, by the aid of my keen hunting-knife, in depriving him of his skin.

CHAPTER IV

I ENTERTAIN FINE COMPANY

THE mid-day sun was streaming down as Masoja and I sat in the shade under the waggon. That evening I might look for the return of Kechima, or the help I had sent for. Suddenly the native started up in a kneeling position.

"There are horses coming!" he said; "I hear them."

"Ah! my friends at last!" I answered.

"They do not come from the side of the drift, Inkoss, they come from there," and he pointed with his hand towards the east.

"But who could come from that quarter?" I asked.

The man made no reply, but ran rapidly in the direction he had pointed to. I saw him disappear behind some bushes; he was only there a minute, and then came running back to the waggon. He was very excited.

"I will come back to thee, Inkoss," he said, "but I cannot wait here now," and without another word he snatched up his assegai, and disappeared behind the clump of bush that had been my resting-place on the memorable night of the attack. It was some time before I caught sight of the approaching horse-

men. At last they showed themselves, as they came riding slowly over the brow of a small hillock about a hundred yards away from the waggon. I could make out that they were three Boers — dirty, ugly specimens of a dirty race. Their unkempt hair hung down on to their shoulders, for they were what colonials call, "taak haarers," or "doppers." They were dressed in corduroys, the trousers being very short and baggy, exposing their dirty, unstockinged ankles, while their jackets only reached down to about their waists. Their faces were covered by rough, bushy beards, and looked as if they had not been washed for a year—very likely true, as your Boer hates water. Each man carried a rifle and a bandolier of cartridges hung over his shoulder. They rode slowly up to my waggon and dismounted, leaving their horses to graze near. Then, after the manner of their countrymen, each one came to me in turn and held out his dirty hand, straight from the elbow, then dropped it into mine as if it were a dead fish. This is their idea of shaking hands. When this ordeal was over, the three of them sat down by me, and, without saying a word, took out their tobacco bags, filled and lighted their pipes, and gazed stupidly before them. Whilst they were thus engaged, I had time to examine them a little more closely.

Two were thick-set men of middle age; the third, who had a horrible squint, was a broad-shouldered young giant of about twenty-five. Presently, one of the two shorter men turned to me, and said:

"Who are you?" I knew the questions that were

coming, so prepared myself to pretend to know as little of their language as possible. I simply answered in the vilest of vile Cape Dutch, "That it was a warm day."

The man grumbled out something about the coffee not being ready yet, a polite hint that he wanted some, and then repeated his question.

At the same time I caught a whisper from the young giant, "The stupid Englishman did not seem to know much of their taal" (language).

"Can you speak Zulu?" asked one of them, addressing me in that language.

"Yes, a little," I replied, answering in the same tongue. Then followed the usual questions that every Boer asks from every one he meets.

"Who are you?" "Where are you going?" "Where do you live?" "What is your business?" etc., etc.

"As to who I am," I replied, "can you not see that I am a smouzer? (trader). Middelburg is the place I last came from, and I am going to the Woodbush village."

"The Woodbush village is far from here," said the man. "It will take you quite eighteen days travelling, and there are many rivers with bad drifts to cross. Then there is the fly and the fever; it would be better, even now, if you returned to Middelburg, and from thence went through Pretoria, Nilstroom, and Pietersburg where the roads are good."

"That may be," I replied, "but I have come so far, and shall go on." The man looked disappointed, as did also his companions; it was evident that I was

not wanted in the near vicinity. They sat moodily smoking for some time, when one of them reminded me that the coffee was not yet ready, a hint that I had not offered them any—a great breach of Boer etiquette.

"Ah!" I said, "excuse me;" and I clambered up into the tent of the waggon, presumably to get the coffee tin, but in reality to watch, for the few seconds I was away, the behaviour of my guests, for such they were, though uninvited. Turning my face towards them, I watched them through a small slit in the canvas, at the same time kept shuffling my feet, and grumbling, as if the much-coveted berry was a difficult thing to find. The sight I saw fully aroused my suspicions; the three heads were placed very closely together, and the young giant was putting something out of a small bit of paper he held in his hand, into a tin pannikin I had left near the fire.

"Now we shan't be long before we have some coffee," I said, as I turned to the fire.

The three men were once more as I had left them, still moodily smoking their pipes. At my words, the young giant laughed, but whether it was at my use of his language, or from pleasant reflections on account of the powder he had put in my pannikin, I do not know.

The kettle was soon boiling, and the coffee made. I produced three other tin pannikins, and poured it out. The one by the fire being by far the biggest, I handed it to the giant, and said with a smile:

"The biggest cup must go to the biggest man."

"No, no," he replied, "I am not thirsty; give me the

small one, and take this one yourself, for why should I take your cup?"

This was certainly the greatest piece of politeness and magnanimity I had ever entertained from any Boer, for by long experience I knew they would take all they could get.

"No," I said, "this is enough for me; I only drank coffee a little time ago," and I began sipping at the pannikin I held in my hand. The other two men laughed, and each helped himself to about a quarter of a pound of sugar out of my sugar tin.

"Won't you have some sugar?" I asked, as I passed the tin over to the big man.

"Not I," he answered.

"Well! that is a strange thing," I continued, "for a Boer not to take sugar; believe me, Nief" (nephew, an expression used to young Boer men), "you are the first I have met who does not take it."

The other two men again laughed, and, to show their appreciation, helped themselves to a couple more large spoonfuls. The younger man sat sulkily smoking his pipe, with the hot coffee steaming before him.

"Come!" I said, "if you are not thirsty, will you eat?"

"Ja, kerl" (yes, fellow), he said, with a grunt.

I went towards the waggon with a pannikin in my hand, and, on returning half a minute later with a tin of sardines and a few peppermints, was not surprised to hear that the big pannikin of coffee had been accidentally knocked over, and my friend, after carefully washing out the pannikin (a precaution for cleanliness a Boer

would never take) had again filled it with coffee, and was now as liberally helping himself to my sugar as his friends had done.

I affected to take no notice of this sudden change of front, and after they had emptied my kettle, eaten the tin of sardines and the peppermints, which they did in alternate mouthfuls (a great Boer luxury), finding they could get nothing more, said, "they were hastaag" (in a great hurry), and getting into their saddles, slowly trippled away (a kind of run, neither gallop, canter, or trot), in the direction from which they had first arrived.

I walked towards my fire to put away the *débris* of the feast, when my eye caught a small piece of pale blue paper on the ground, where the young giant had been sitting. I picked it up. A few small grains of a whitey powder were still on it. I carefully folded it up, and placed it in my pocket-book. I was returning towards the waggon when I heard a low whistle; it came from the clump of bush, and cautiously peering out was the much be-feathered, woolly head of Kechima.

"So you have returned!" I said.

"Inkoss!" was his reply, uttered in a whisper, as he held a long white stick towards me, in the cleft of which was a letter.

I seized it, and tore it open. It was only a few lines from my good friend, the landlord of the hotel, in which he hoped I was fit and well, and telling me that he had delivered my letter to the Landrost (who evidently had told him nothing of the contents), and had sent the other one by special messenger after my friend, who

had, the night before its arrival, started for the Olifants river coal district, where he expected to be for about ten days to a fortnight.

"But, have you not got me a driver and voorlooper?" I said, as I looked up, to find that Kechima had gone—gone without his much prized sovereign! There was not the least doubt of it; he had vanished, and here was I in as big a fix as ever!

By the letter I had received from the landlord of the Standard Hotel, Middelburg, I felt pretty sure that I should not hear from my friend for the next five or six days. There was nothing to do but to wait. I wondered why Masoja and Kechima, especially the latter, had been so mysterious, as a native will go through fire and water for mali (money).

My papers and two small miniatures set with brilliants that I had with me I particularly wished to keep from prying eyes, and it struck me that, in the event of accidents (for I had a presentiment something strange was going to happen), it would be advisable to find a safe place to conceal them. An idea occurred to me. Going to my small tool-chest, I produced a chisel, and dived beneath the waggon. I had always had a taste for carpentry, and in less than an hour had succeeded in making a slit about a foot long, two inches wide, and four deep, in the massive, solid block of wood that supported my after-axle. Going for my pocket-book, I extracted the papers and miniatures, and placing them in a big envelope, together with the small piece of blue paper I had picked up near the fire, containing the powder, I slipped in the red lead pencil, and closed the

envelope, directed it to myself, and in ten minutes' time the small aperture was closed up by a thin slip of wood being carefully nailed over it; then, after a few dabs of paint had been plastered over this, no one would ever notice that the axle-tree had been tampered with.

"Now for the cattle," I thought, and went out to look for them, but I could not find them. At last, just as I was about to give up all hope of ever seeing them again, I heard a faint tinkle. I hurried forward, and to my surprise, found that the sound came from the interior of a well-made cattle kraal. I went up and looked over the stockade. They were certainly my cattle, that is to say, all there were of them, for only thirteen remained. I lost no time in drawing back the poles that kept them in, and drove them towards my camping ground; but it was much further than I thought, and the sun had long set before I once more arrived at my waggon.

During the whole of my pilgrimage I had not seen a single human being, but it was certain there must have been some one near at hand otherwise the cattle could not have got into the kraal.

Hardly had I been back a few minutes when again my attention was attracted by a low whistle from the same place as before. It was fairly light, for the moon had risen, though she was still behind the tall trees on the opposite bank of the river. As I advanced towards the place where the sound came from, a figure stepped out. It was Masoja.

"The white man must not sleep in the waggon!" he said hurriedly, "but must take his rifle and go at once," and a second later he had gone.

Masoja! Masoja!" I called after him, but no answer came. What could it mean? I went to the waggon to get my rifle, but could not find it. I struck a match, and peered about. No, it had gone! my bandolier of cartridges as well, and now I came to look closer, several other small articles were missing.

"How lucky it is I still have my revolver!" I thought, and I stretched out my hand to see the time by my watch, which I had left hanging in my light linen coat, suspended by a nail from the top of the waggon; but though the coat was there, the pockets were empty! Both watch and pocket-book had gone, and I blessed my lucky stars that I had secreted the important papers during the afternoon.

There certainly must be something in the warning I had received from Masoja. What was I to do? I sat down on a small box in the waggon to think. I had thrown the waggon-sail back; this gave me a clear view out.

As I kept cogitating over and over in my mind the best thing to be done, an old familiar sound fell upon my ear. I started up, and went eagerly to the back of the waggon so that I might hear it plainer. Yes, I was certain of it—there could be no mistake; it was the sound of galloping horses, and this time, thank goodness! they were on the other side of the river and fast approaching the drift. My friend, Will Hallimond, could not possibly have reached me yet, and knowing what I did of Boer officialism, I could but congratulate myself on the promptitude the Landrost of Middelburg was displaying in coming to my assistance. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the trivial circumstances of the murder of

a native, the theft of some cattle, and that an Englishman's life was in danger, would hardly have produced such alacrity; and I waved my lantern from the back of the waggon towards them, to better direct their path.

I heard the horses plunge into the river at the other side. I reckoned from the noise they made there would be about half a dozen of them, but what struck me as most strange was the fact that, for a Boer patrol, a dead silence prevailed amongst the men, for in ordinary cases they make enough row to awaken the dead.

The party crossed; I heard the horses' hoofs as they crunched the gravel. They topped the bank, and rode straight towards me, as, lantern in hand, I waited for them. The cavalcade consisted of six men. I walked towards them, two men dismounted, and before I knew how it could have happened, I was on my back, my arms and legs were tied, and a handkerchief was fastened over my face, but not before I managed to discern that the men who committed the outrage were either masked or black, but I thought the former.

CHAPTER V

A CAPTIVE

I HAD not long to wonder what was to happen next. The handkerchief was tied securely at the back of my head, I was lifted from the ground, to my utter surprise, carried to my own waggon, and deposited in the cartel. The sail at the back was pulled down, and I was left to my own reflections. They certainly were very confused, for I was quite at a loss to understand why the white men (for though I did not see them I was certain they were white, for natives would have acted quite differently) had made me their prisoner.

Not a single word had been uttered by any of them. Presently the sail was lifted, a pair of strong arms turned me over and passed a reim in a clove hitch round my body. I could make out that the ends were being fastened to a stanchion at each side of the waggon. At the same time the rope that secured my hands was cut, and the handkerchief drawn from my face; then the sail was again dropped, and I was left with my hands free and my head uncovered, lying on my back on my mattress, gazing up to the top of my waggon, but, being pitch dark inside, I could not see it. I tried to move so that I might sit up, but found that I

had been tied in such a manner that it would be quite impossible, so I had to remain where I was, and make the best of it. I felt in my trouser pocket behind; my revolver and pipe were both there. One can always think better when smoking, so I took out the latter.

From where I lay, I knew my match-box was within reach; I stretched out my hand and found it. An instant later I struck a match and applied it to my pipe. Hardly had I done so, when the sail was drawn aside. I knew that some one was looking at me, but as the crown of my head was towards the back of the waggon, I could not see the person.

"Ja, Baas, you can smoke!" said a voice, and from the pronunciation I guessed the speaker was a Hottentot; then the sail was again dropped, and these were the only words I heard from my captors that night.

"It is evident," I thought, "they do not want to murder me, or they could have done so long ago." Well, the best thing under the circumstances was sleep, and in a very few minutes I had passed into the land of dreams.

I dreamt that I was in a rough sea, and the vessel was pitching and rolling heavily. Was the whole thing a dream after all? and was I in reality on board the great liner ploughing her way through the stormy billows to the Cape?

Bump, bump, bump. "Yaiks! yaiks!" I had never heard that word of command on board ship, and I awoke with a start, and tried to sit up, but found I could not; and then, in a second, it flashed across me that the first part had been a dream, but that the bumps and yells to the oxen were stern realities. I

was a prisoner in my own waggon, being drawn by my own oxen, and going—I knew not where.

Through a slit in the corner of the front sail of the waggon I could see that the day was breaking. Then I thought of the hole in the canvas, through which I had watched my three guests of the previous day, and found that by craning my neck I could every now and then catch a glimpse of the figure I could hear tramping alongside. He was evidently the man who had spoken to me the night before, and told me I might smoke. I found my surmise was right when I had thought he was a Hottentot.

He wore a suit of corduroy, the trousers being turned up to the knees, revealing his brown, sinewy legs; his feet were covered by a pair of thick, unlaced, hobnailed boots; on his head he wore a kind of red night-cap, and a short clay pipe was sticking out of the corner of his large, ugly mouth; my long bamboo waggon whip was balanced on his shoulder, and as he slouched along, I could see that he was a true specimen of the Hottentot who had seen civilisation at the Diamond Fields of Kimberley, or the Gold Fields of the Rand. He appeared to be the only person in charge of the waggon, for I had not even heard him address a word to the voorlooper; but, as voorloopers are generally small boys or raw savages, this might be accounted for, as the Hottentot has a supreme contempt for them, and looks upon himself almost as on an equal footing with his white master. Certainly he copies him in every way as far as his vices are concerned, and generally possesses a full share of both those of white and black.

Drink he idolises—there is little short of murder he will not do for it. I knew this. My situation was desperate. There was nothing else left for me to do, so I determined to make capital out of it.

"Come here; I want to speak to you!" I shouted.

"What does the Baas want?" he answered.

"How is it I have not had my coffee?" I went on in Cape Dutch.

"There was no time for coffee this morning, Baas, before inspanning," he answered in the same language.

"Then I must have something else."

"But where is the Baas to get it?"

"Come to the waggon and I will tell you."

For a few seconds I could make out that he was peering up and down the trek, then he came and put his head in at the back of the waggon.

"Unloosen the reim a little; it is cutting me," were my first words.

"No, Baas; I dare not."

"Then you cannot have a soupee" (drink).

The man dropped the sail, and went back to his place beside the waggon. He drew close up to the wheel and began addressing me in a low tone:

"The Baas will not tell if I loosen the reim a bit?"

"No; I will not tell," I replied.

"The groote Baas is an Englishman," came the voice, "and I believe him; the Boer menser lie, they all lie, and if the Baas was one I would not do it."

"I have told you the truth, so come and do it quickly, for I am stiff and sore from lying so long in the same position."

"The Baas must be patient," came the answer; "I cannot do it here. The Boer menser ride in front and behind, but when they come to the deep kloof they will ride on for breakfast, then I will make the reim looser, and," he added in a whining key, "the Baas will give me a soupee?"

"How long will it be before we get to the deep kloof?"

"Another half hour, Baas," and then, as if it looked suspicious that he should be lingering near the waggon wheel, he walked forward towards the leading oxen.

"So," I thought to myself, "I have found out something. I am the prisoner of some Boers," and I wondered who they could be, and their reason for making me their captive.

The waggon rumbled, jumbled, and jolted on; the half hour seemed interminable, and again I had recourse to my pipe. I heard some horses pass me on the opposite side to that of the slit in the canvas. They were going at a swinging canter, and, as far as I could judge from the noise they made, appeared to number from three to four, and from the pace they were going would soon be out of earshot. Presently the Hottentot ran to the after part of the waggon, and began applying the screw-brake.

"Can you not lift the sail a little at the back," I asked, "the waggon is very hot!"

"Ja, Baas, shortly," and he began yelling "anow!"—a word of caution to oxen to halt, or go easy. From the manner in which the wheels slid, I knew we must be descending a path almost like a precipice. The waggon

swayed from side to side. Two or three times I thought we should overturn. Bang, bang, bang—bump, bump, bump it went, and every bone in my body seemed to rattle. At last, with a great many yells of "anow," and long shrill whistles, which apprised me for the first time that there was a voorlooper, the great heavy vehicle came to a standstill. The Hottentot came to the back of the waggon, unscrewed the brake, and at the same time slightly lifted the sail at my back.

"Baas, I am very thirsty!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Good! loosen the reim round me, and you shall have what you want."

"The Baas will not tell?"

"You have heard what I told you?"

"Ja, Baas," and a second later he was loosening the reim that secured me to the cartel, and I can hardly express the relief I felt at once more being able to sit up. I unfastened the reim that bound my legs, my ankles were swollen and burning, and when I gave the blood its full circulation, for the first few moments the pain was intense, so much so, that I had to lie down again.

The Hottentot who had left me now returned.

"The Baas will give me the soupee?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, as I sat up, and twisting myself round managed with some difficulty to slip through the reim that had been holding me. When he saw that I was quite free, he gave an exclamation of fear.

"The Baas must lie down again," he said, his teeth chattering.

"Very good," I replied, as I quickly sank on the cartel, "but I thought you wanted the brandy?"

"Ja, Baas, certainly," he whined.

"Then how am I to get it for you when I am lying here?"

'Will the Baas tell me where it is, and I will get it?"

"No, that cannot be;" and I proceeded leisurely to fill and light my pipe. For a few minutes I lay quite quiet, puffing away, as if I had forgotten all about the promised drink.

All this time the man was standing at the back of the waggon, and I knew that he was watching me.

"The groote Baas can get up if he likes," he said, "but I must first put down the waggon-sail, and if he hears any one coming he must lie down again."

I did not answer, and without another word he dropped the sail behind me.

It may seem strange that a white man should have lain quiet at the bidding of a Hottentot servant, but I knew that if I had shown any opposition he could speedily have had assistance on the spot; and though I loathed the idea, for the present I had to humour him.

Immediately the sail had dropped, I seized hold of my haversack, which I was pleased to see was still hanging from its usual nail in the waggon. I had had it made specially for me; it carried almost double the quantity that a military haversack did. In a very few minutes I had crammed it full of ship's-biscuits, a couple of pound tins of compressed beef, a bottle of brandy, a packet of matches, a flannel shirt, and a few plugs of hard tobacco. I did my packing as noiselessly as

possible, and was just on the point of fastening up the bag, when I heard a stealthy footstep. It seemed to be within ten yards of the waggon. Instantly I threw a blanket over the sack, and with another over my body, resumed my old position of the night before. The sail at the back moved a little, and I felt sure that somebody was looking in. I lay perfectly still. Evidently satisfied with the scrutiny, I heard the footsteps creeping away very cautiously. I raised myself on my elbow, turned round, and peered out from the side where my visitor had not quite succeeded in closing the sail at the back. As I did so, I caught sight of a thick-set man in a corduroy suit, talking in whispers to the Hottentot. He was only about fifty paces from me, but as he had a big smasher hat on, and was turned from me, I could not see his face, but somehow or other his back seemed familiar. Where had I seen it? I had not much time for reflection, for, without turning round, he walked into the thick bush at the side of the path, and disappeared. The Hottentot shook his fist in the direction of the stranger, then turned and came slowly towards the waggon. As he neared me, I half filled a pannikin with Cape brandy.

"Then you do not want your drink?" I said softly, as he passed.

"Just now," he said, in the same quiet voice without stopping; and I concluded that the coast was not yet clear.

In about a quarter of an hour he put his face into the waggon, and said with a grin:

"Now, Baas, I will have my soupee."

I handed him the pannikin of the rough, raw spirit.

He took it at a draught, smacking his lips, and coughing desperately after it.

"Ah! my friend," I thought to myself, "one or two more like that, and you and I will part company."

Presently he came back.

"Can the Baas give me a little tobacco?"

I gave him a plug of cavendish. In no time he was back again.

"That is good brandy of the Baas's; it is like the brandy I used to get in Kimberley."

"Yes, it is strong brandy," I replied, and went on smoking my pipe, affecting not to notice the hint.

"I want some nice cool water; can the voorlooper get me some?"

"The voorlooper, Baas, is away with the oxen down by the spruit (brook) at the bottom of the kloof, but there is water in the water-barrel."

"I know that, but it is not cool."

The man did not answer, but went on smoking his pipe, and I lay calmly down on my cartel, and went on smoking mine, as if the fetching of the cool water was of no consequence. By-and-bye the Hottentot rose slowly from where he had been seated at the foot of an enormous tree, under which the waggon had been drawn.

"Does the groote Baas want the water now?" he asked.

"Oh! it does not matter," I said, sleepily.

He did not go away, but kept hanging about the back of the waggon.

"If the Baas gives me another soupee, I will fetch the water."

"No, you must have no more drink, and I can wait till the voorlooper returns with the oxen."

"The groote Baas shall not wait, but he will give me a soupee when I return?" he asked entreatingly, and unhooking the water-barrel from the waggon, I heard him tramping away in the direction of the spruit down the winding path, flanked on each side by huge trees, which rose tier upon tier, until they touched the crest of the high hills on both sides, the bases of which formed the valley or kloof, as it is called, in which we were situated. The water, judging from the formation of the ground, would be at least half a mile off. Being down hill it was easy work to get to it, but it would require some time to mount again, especially as the man would be carrying a heavy cask. Clearly, this was the time for action, and his footsteps had hardly died away when, with my haversack firmly strapped to my back, I had climbed upon the top of the waggon, and mounted into the thick branches of the great tree above. I had only gone up a few feet, when I suddenly thought of something. Hastily descending, I reached the ground, then taking off my boots, ran for about fifty yards up the road, taking good care to run at the side, where the imprint of my feet could best be seen; then I returned to the waggon through the trees. Leaving the half-emptied bottle of brandy on the ground, so that it could easily be seen, I once more began my ascent, and was soon safely hidden away from view amongst the top branches of this giant of the forest.

CHAPTER VI

THE RULE OF THE SJAMBOK

I HAD been on my perch for about half an hour, during which time I had not been idle. By the aid of my small axe I had lopped off several branches, and made quite a comfortable little bed, when I heard my volunteer water-carrier returning. He was giving vent to his high spirits by carolling a well-known old Cape song:—

"Swaar dra al op die ein kant,
Johnny mit die oopel been"

came floating up to me. Presently I heard him just below.

"Baas, I have the water," he said; "I am very thirsty, so give me the soupee;" then came the ejaculation: "Allermenser! Baas! Baas!" he yelled. "Where is the Baas?" Then I heard him running up the road, evidently following my footprints; he soon came back.

"Then will I drink," I heard him say aloud, and he must have spied the bottle.

Soon he began to sing and shout; then the singing got drowsier, and at last there was silence. I concluded he had gone to sleep. Judging from the sun, I reckoned

that it must be about eleven o'clock. As I had had anything but a pleasant night, I stretched myself out on my impromptu bed, and slept as comfortably as if I had been on my cartel, a hundred feet below.

I conceived it to be about five when I awoke, and in an instant realised my situation. Except for some heavy snores that convinced me the Hottentot was still in the land of dreams, not a sound stirred the air.

Suddenly I heard the familiar tinkle, tinkle of my cattle-bell, and I guessed that the oxen were being sent back to be inspanned. Gradually their steps became more and more distinct as they got nearer to the waggon, and every now and then the Kafir voorlooper who was driving them would give a shout or shrill whistle. At last I knew that they were just below me.

"Ow! ow!"—it was the Kafir boy's exclamation of astonishment, as he spied the sleeping form of the drunken Hottentot.

"The mulungu told me to inspan," he called, and I could hear him shaking the sleeper.

"Too much drink, plenty bad," I heard him say. Then he began to shake the man again, but the Hottentot had undoubtedly finished the bottle, and he would be like a log for the next hour.

Kafirs are philosophers—time is of no consequence to them; so I presume, though I could not see him, the boy sat down and played with his toes, or made marks on the road with a piece of stick—both occupations they are capable of keeping up for many hours. Whatever he was doing, for the next half hour nothing betrayed his presence.

At last I caught the sound of a horse's tread; it halted some little distance off, then I heard a whistle. The Kafir boy jumped up and ran towards the sound. I could catch the hum of his voice as he spoke to somebody, but I could not hear the words. Then came a torrent of abuse in Cape Dutch. I could distinctly hear the swish of a sjambok as it cut through the air, a cry of pain from the boy, and a second later the rider was galloping towards the waggon. He reached it, dismounted, then blow after blow, mingled with torrents of imprecations, fell upon the hapless sleeper. The Hottentot, yelling with pain, sprang to his feet, completely sobered.

"Where is the Englishman?" roared the infuriated Boer; "where is he? Tell me, or I will cut the heart out of you."

Then followed more yells, and the scuffling of feet, as the Hottentot vainly tried to get away from the iron grasp that held him; then another torrent of abuse, mingled with more blows and yells. The latter ceased as I heard a body fall to the ground; the driver must have fainted. The Boer gave his senseless victim a few more cuts, then galloped away in the direction of the spruit.

Was I to leave him there, to go through a similar form of treatment from every other member of the gang? for I was convinced there was a gang, but for what object, and why I was in its clutches, I was at a loss to understand. I had not travelled through South Africa from north to south, and east to west, for nothing, and knew well what was in store for the wretch below me, at the hands of the quiet, "peaceful, God-fearing," Bible-thumping hypocrites that constitute the majority of the

farming population of South Africa in general and the Transvaal in particular.

There was nothing for it; I must save the man, and that at once. Hastily unstrapping my haversack, so that I could move more easily, I fastened it to my lofty bedroom, and quickly descended the tree. It had never entered my head that the voorlooper might see me, and give information; however, when my feet touched the top of the waggon, I saw no traces of him, and concluded that to escape the wrath of the Boers for the time being he had taken refuge in the bush.

I soon spied my man, about thirty paces to the rear of the waggon, though at first he only looked like a bundle of rags lying in the middle of the path. I jumped lightly to the ground, snatched up my tin billy, filled it with water, and taking off my boots, hurried to where the man was lying. The cruel rhinoceros whip, wielded by that powerful arm, had literally cut his clothes to pieces, and every here and there they were stained with blood. I dashed a little water in his face, and poured some down his throat; it seemed to revive him almost immediately, and he gave a groan.

"Come, make haste!" I said, and half dragging, half carrying him, I conducted him into the bush, and then through the trees towards the waggon. At each step he seemed better to understand that I wanted to help him. All torn and bleeding, I shoved him on to the waggon roof, and thence into the tree; every minute I expected to hear the Boers returning. However, we reached the top, and after making my litter more secure by the help of a couple of reims I had grabbed up

when on *terra firma*, I told him to lie down, and, if he valued his life, not to utter a single word unless I spoke to him.

"You are my master," was all he said, and lay down without another word.

I was beginning to think the Boers had forgotten all about myself and the waggon, and was speculating whether or not to remain in my hiding-place, when I heard a shout, and several horses cantering in my direction. They were soon beneath me, and I plainly heard every word that was said. One voice I was certain was that of the young giant whom I had entertained with coffee the day before; he appeared to answer to the name of Piet. Another man was Hans, and a third was named Koos.

"I left the Hottentot on the ground when I went away," said Hans. "I thought he would have been quiet for the next couple of hours!"

"It is a pity he is not here now," said another voice; "I wanted to try my new sjambok!" and he gave a laugh.

"Never mind," said the first speaker, "he will come back before long; and when he has cooked the coffee, and given us our supper, you can give him his," and again there was a laugh.

"But where can this Englishman be?" said the man they called Koos. "Depend upon it, he is skulking somewhere near here."

"Not he, you may be sure," said Piet; "you can depend upon it he would not stay so near the waggon. I expect he is running yet, like they all did at Majuba!"

"Then I had better ride on a bit, and see if I can get a sight of him."

"Do not waste your horse, you fool!" said Hans; "the Englishman is a sharp fellow, and is probably in hiding until night. Jan Neumanheuis and Long Piet are going to the drift, and will catch him."

"But what if he goes through the kloof, crosses the spruit, and gets back across the river at Kalkfontein drift?" grumbled Koos.

"Not he!" said the other; "if he did, it would be a bad thing; but as long as he does not get back into Middelburg, all will go well. Du Toit told me they are getting a bit scared in Pretoria, since that new Governor at the Cape will ask questions; but Du Toit is very sly!"

"Ja, ja," said Piet, with a laugh, "we have a good Landrost!"

Du Toit!—the Landrost!—what could it mean? He was the very man I had written to for help! but I had no time for further reflections.

"Where is that voorlooper?" said one of them.

"I expect he is in the bush scratching himself," Hans replied, with a brutal laugh. "I tickled him with my sjambok before I went to the spruit."

"Kafir! come here!" yelled one of the men.

"Inkoss," came an answering voice from the bush, and I heard footsteps running.

"Where are the oxen?" asked Hans.

"They are grazing, Inkoss," said the lad, with a trembling voice.

"Bring them to me inspanned," said Hans; "and

look here, if you are not sharp, you shall have another taste of my sjambok."

The boy darted away, and in a very few minutes I heard the cattle as they were being driven towards the waggon.

"Come, you black dog, be quick!" roared Hans.

"Inkoss, Inkoss," came the frightened reply from the voorlooper.

The waggon was inspanned. "Yaiks! yaiks!" roared Hans; crack, crack went the great whip, like so many pistol shots, and I heard my belongings, oxen and waggon, rumble slowly away. Occasionally I caught a yell from the brutal driver Hans, but the rumbling and shouting got fainter and fainter, and soon died away altogether.

I could hardly realise that, for the time being, I had lost all that I possessed, and I wondered whether fate would be kind and restore the property once more to the rightful owner.

A slight sound from the man near me brought me back to my senses. I looked down upon him; he was wide awake. "Truly," I thought to myself, "we are 'up a tree,' and under the circumstances would it be advisable to descend?"

"Do you know this place?" I said to the Hottentot.

"Ja, Baas, I have been here three times."

"Then how can we get back to Middelburg without going back to the drift?"

"The Baas can get there, but the journey is long, and the Baas will have to pass the winkel (shop) of the groote Baas Hans."

"Has Baas Hans a winkel near here?" I said, in surprise.

'Ja; the Baas's waggon is going there now."

"My waggon going there?"

"Did not the Baas know that? Was not the Baas bringing goods to the winkel of the groote Baas Hans?"

"But I was not going there; who said I was?"

"The Boer menser told me, but then they lied, they always lie," he said, as if speaking to himself.

"If it was my wish to go to the winkel, why should they have tied me in my waggon to take me there?"

"Baas, Baas, I know not, but strange things are done on this side of the Olifants river; it was not so in Kimberley."

"The moon will not rise until two hours after sunset," I said.

"Ja, Baas."

"Then we will leave half an hour after sunset."

"Ja, Baas," he replied again, and then lapsed into silence.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE TRAIL OF THE WAGGON

AT all times it is a novel sensation to find one's self perched on the top branches of a high tree, but when that tree happens to be in the midst of an almost unknown African kloof, and the lion and hyena are not unfrequently to be found prowling at its foot, not to mention the reptiles that may be lurking in its branches, the situation can be better imagined than described. Added to this, the knowledge that a party of ruffians were eager, for some reason or other, to get me into their hands, and would certainly keep the sharpest of sharp look-outs for me, gave me plenty of food for reflection. In fact, the time passed so quickly that, almost before I could realise it, darkness had set in, and with it the accompanying strange weird sounds that are always to be heard in the South African forests.

"What is your name?" I said to the Hottentot, who during the last couple of hours had not ventured a single word.

"They call me Martinus, Baas."

"Then, Martinus, we must go. The moon will be up in an hour and a half, and we must pass the winkel before then."

"Ja, Baas," he replied, and immediately began to climb down the tree, whilst I followed with my haversack. When we arrived at the bottom I looked at my revolver, and took good care that he saw me doing so. He noticed my action but did not say a word.

"Walk on the road; there is less chance of being heard than on the grass at the side," I said; "the breaking twigs can be heard a long distance."

I had taken off my boots, and was walking in my stockings. As for my companion, he had left his clumsy hobnails behind. We walked quickly along the road, turning and twisting a great deal as it gradually descended to the running brook, which I could already hear as it rushed swiftly along at the bottom of the kloof.

The road was very dark, the great trees meeting overhead. It was evident it had only recently been cut, and but little used.

It seemed strange that any man should have gone to the expense of erecting a store in such an out-of-the-way spot. At length we arrived on the bank of the spruit. The Hottentot walked in, the water taking him just above the knee when in the middle; I filled my billy with the clear, cool water, and then joined him on the other side. He pulled my sleeve, and pointed to a little footpath branching off to the left from the main trek.

"This side," he whispered, and we pushed quickly along it. Turning a corner, a light shot out across the path; it came from the half-open door of a house, round the front of which it appeared to wind.

"Make haste, and look out for the dog," said the man, and as he did so he stooped down, almost going on his hands and knees, and shot past the light, closely followed by me. A moment later a deep growl came from the house.

"Be still," said a voice, that of an old woman, as she appeared at the door, and began peering about. We had both thrown ourselves flat on the ground.

"What is the matter, Aunt Sanie?" said a sweet clear voice, and a second figure joined her at the door. She held a rush candle over her head, but what a lovely face!—those large eyes and delicately chiselled nose and mouth—that little dainty head, covered with a mass of golden hair! Could this be the daughter of a rude, uncouth, ignorant Boer? Impossible!

"Come in," said the old woman; "the men will soon be back, and want their supper; the dog is foolish to-night. Footseck!" she said, as the head of a huge Kafir hound appeared between them, "get inside, and look after the house!" The dog turned, still growling, and at her bidding re-entered the house. The young woman followed, and I could hear her patting him. Could I believe my ears? "Poor old boy," I heard her say in perfect English. The old woman held the candle above her head once more, but, appearing to be satisfied, entered the house, leaving open the top part of the half-door, usually found in Boer houses, but carefully fastened the bottom.

"Hist!" said the Hottentot, and he glided quickly away. I took the hint and followed, for my quick ear, as his no doubt had already done, caught the tramp of

approaching horsemen. They were coming towards us. The man dived into the bush at the side of the path; I followed, drew my revolver, and we both lay down. The horsemen came nearer, and I soon recognised the voices of the party who had so unceremoniously walked off with my waggon in the early part of the afternoon.

"I will give it another coat of paint to-morrow, and put some new flowers on the side-box. I have taken off the plate with the maker's name, and have put on the one off the old waggon we found on the veldt last April." It was the man they called Piet who was speaking. Then there was a laugh. "The devil himself will not be able to recognise it in another twenty-four hours," he went on. "It was a good idea putting on Cellier's plate; the Paarl waggons always fetch the best price; I see he got it in Maritzburg."

"How much do you think we ought to get for it?" asked the man I now recognised as Koos.

"I think I can get twenty pounds cash down, and another thirty in three months," said the first speaker. "Old Oom Neumanheuiser wants a new waggon, and asked me to look out for one for him."

"Well, come on," said Koos; "I am hungry, and I want to taste the big cheese the Englishman has given us," and with another laugh they cantered on.

"There is no time to waste, Baas," said Martinus, as he tugged at my shirt sleeve. "The moon will be up soon, and Baas Hans must be out yet, for he did not pass us," and we once more crept out on to the rugged path, and, at the pace we went, soon left the solitary house far behind us.

"Where is the winkel you spoke of?" I asked. "Surely you do not mean the house we passed?"

"No, Baas; it is a little further, and about a hundred paces to the right of the path. We must be careful when passing it."

"Who lives at the store?"

"Sometimes the groote Baas Hans, when he is not at the Woodbush village, and at others, Piet Naude, or Slim Koos."

"But what trade can a man find in a place like this?"

"There is a great trade, Baas. When the 'boys' from Delagoa go to Johannesburg, they pass this way, and when they return, they do likewise; though," he added under his breath, "it is said that many of them, when their strap[1] is full, never get any further. They say the brandy-wine sold by the groote Baas Hans is very strong, and that after much of it has been drunk some never wake again; but I do not say it," he continued, "the Baas must not say I have said so. The groote Baas Hans is very powerful, and, besides, he is a friend of the Heer Landrost du Toit of Middelburg."

"How do you know that?"

"The last time I came here it was as driver to a waggon for a party of friends, of which the Heer Landrost was one, and Heer de Kock, the auctioneer, was another. They stopped three days. I heard they were coming to shoot, and they brought their guns with them, but none of them ever left the winkel except to

[1] The native wears a strap round his arm, in which he carries his money.

go to the house we passed a little while ago. I think the Landrost was fraaing (courting) the young woman we saw to-night, but she did not seem very pleased about it, for I caught her down by the spruit on the second day, and she was crying as if she had lost a lover instead of having found one. Ah! those were three long days; they did nothing but drink and whip the Kafir boys; I think ten were tied up during that time. Baas Hans was the one to use the sjambok most, but twice I saw the Landrost use it himself, and once Heer de Kock also took the whip.

"I remember the last one they whipped was a Kafir boy—Masoja. The Landrost said he wanted some milk to put in his gin; but when the boy returned with only half a cupful, and said that the cow was dry, Baas Hans told him he would not have his friends insulted in that way, and tied him up to the waggon, and gave him twenty-five with the sjambok. Then, as he was letting him go, he gave him another five, just to let him know, as he said, that his arm was not yet tired, but that he had strength enough left to give him a hundred. Then he called us all, and told us the pastor had said we ought to be merciful, though at the same time he told us a man called Solomon said that 'to spare the sjambok was to spoil the child,' but what Solomon he meant, Baas, I do not know, but there was a man of that name who kept a winkel in Kimberley."

"I have met Masoja," I said.

"You have met him, Baas!—where?"

"It is not long ago."

"I did not think he would live," said the Hottentot,

"but that they would have thrown him with the others at the end of the mealie field. We are near the house, Baas. Keep well in the shade of the trees, and do not make any sound, or their dog may hear you."

I now caught sight of the store. It was an ordinary galvanised iron building, standing back about a hundred paces from the path. A small verandah ran in front of the structure, and through the half-opened door I could catch sight of the figure of a man lolling on a sort of rough counter, whilst another was sitting on an up-ended barrel near him. They were conversing in high tones, and were evidently not afraid of their conversation being overheard.

"But I tell you it is of the best make," the man who had his back towards me was saying; "have you not seen that it was made by Celliers of the Paarl?"

"I have not seen it yet," the other replied, "but sixty pounds is a long price. You say the Englishman who sold it you was rich; then why did he sell it?"

"That I can't tell," the first speaker answered. "He got a message to return to the Colony at once, and took the first offer he could get. But come and see it for yourself; it is strange you should have ridden over this very day. Long Piet told me he heard you wanted a good waggon. I was going to send over to you in the morning."

The men started up. I thought they would be coming out, but instead of that they passed through the back door, and I soon heard their voices again. I presume my waggon had been drawn to the back of the house to be painted, and avoid any suspicion that might occur.

"The groote Baas Hans and Oom Neumanheuiser!" said the Hottentot anxiously. "Let us go, Baas—it is not good to be here."

"No!" I said in a rage; "I have found my waggon, and I am not going without it."

"Baas, Baas," said my companion in a scared voice, "you do not know these people. There are many of them—you are only one; and besides," he added, "you cannot pull a waggon by yourself that takes sixteen oxen to draw at other times!"

"True! but I want my waggon."

"Then the Baas had better wait until morning, or when he is able to take it."

"Well!" I said with a grunt, "what is to be done now?"

"First, to get away from the house, Baas, and then to think."

His advice was good, so we crept quietly away.

About two hundred yards further on, we came to a dense thicket of bush. The man said he knew it, and that there was a spring of water in it; he had been there before.

"The Boer menser know of the spring, Baas, but they never go there; they have drink water near the winkel, and the Baas knows they never wash!" and he spat on the ground to show his disgust.

One thing was certain—I should have to follow that waggon wherever it went; and I thought of the papers that were so safely concealed in the axle-tree.

Sleep is essential to everybody; it renovates the mind and body; without it we can do nothing. Martinus

had had his share in the afternoon, so, as there was absolutely nothing to be done, I determined to snatch forty winks when I could; and throwing myself on the ground, in spite of damp, mosquitos, snakes, and the millions of other crawling things that inhabit the South African veldt and forest, I was soon under its calming influence, whilst Martinus kept watch beside me.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOERS HAVE SPORT

I AWOKE with a start, for I felt that some one was pulling my arm. By the dim light that came struggling through the overhanging boughs I could make out that it was only the Hottentot.

"What is the matter?" I asked in a whisper. He did not answer, but simply pressed my arm to enforce silence. I could hear some one or something walking through the undergrowth; it came straight to our hiding-place. Now I could make out the figure of a man. He advanced quietly; in his hand he appeared to be carrying some round object, and as he stooped to fill it with water, I saw that it was a calabash. He was turning to go when his eyes caught mine; I wondered he had not seen me before, as we were not three yards apart.

"Ow!" was his first ejaculation of surprise.

"Toola!" (silence) I hissed between my teeth, as I thrust my revolver barrel within an inch of his face.

"Inkoss! Inkoss!" he said in a low voice, and to my utter surprise, I discovered that he was none other than Masoja.

"Why are you here?" I asked in a stern whisper.

"Inkoss, I come but to drink the water of the Tagati (spirit), that my wounded shoulder may get better."

"But why come in the dark? have you been sent here?" I asked suspiciously.

"The Tagati does not haunt the spring by day, and I have come of my own accord," was his answer.

"Masoja, if you are lying it will go bad with you."

"Inkoss, my tongue is straight; I came but to get the water; you gave me meat to eat, and muti (medicine) to drink. The mulungu was like a father to Masoja, and —he does not forget it."

"Then why did you leave me?"

"The groote Baas Hans was near—I saw him, and my back was still sore from the sjambok, so I feared to come."

"You know my waggon?"

"It is near the winkel, and I wondered the mulungu was not with it."

"Well, Masoja, as you say, I have been your father; watch that waggon, and come and tell me what they would do with it."

"Inkoss, it shall be done as you have said," and he glided quickly away.

All that day we lay in our hiding-place; occasionally we could hear loud talking and shouting, and from the noise made, knew there were several Boers at the winkel. Later in the afternoon a running fire of musketry was kept up, and I knew they were at their favourite pastime when more or less under the influence of strong drink—that of shooting at empty bottles, and betting on their shots; for the men of this holy race are inveterate gamblers!

None of the shots came our way—a pretty sure sign that they were totally ignorant of our presence; and night had set in but no Masoja came.

I was beginning to give up all hopes of ever seeing him again when I heard stealthy footsteps in the bush, and presently he was standing near me.

"I could not come sooner, Inkoss, for the winkel is full of Boers; they have shot much to-day; the Landrost from Middelburg and three of his white brothers are there, and they are all drinking much strong water. I fear the sjambok will be at work soon."

"What about the waggon?" I asked.

"Inkoss, it is a new waggon?" he replied. "From sun-up this morning until mid-day, the Boer Piet and the groote Baas Hans have been painting it: I held the paint-pot for one."

"Did they paint it underneath?'

"Inkoss, all is painted."

Then evidently they had not found the resting-place of my papers, and I gave a sigh of relief.

Our conversation had barely ceased, when there was a great deal of shouting and yelling. Masoja started.

"Stay where you are," I said sternly. A crackling noise broke upon the air, and a sheet of flame shot up into the heavens. I ran towards the outskirts of the wood; sure enough, the store was on fire! Men were rushing about in all directions—there was a loud explosion! then another, and another! The gunpowder stored in the shop must have blown up; one more tremendous bang, and the iron shanty, once dignified by the name of store, or winkel, had disappeared for

ever, and all that now remained were a few burning boards and twisted sheets of galvanised iron.

As the bright flames shot up into the sky, they revealed several figures grouped together at no great distance off, but directly facing the spot on the outskirts of the wood where we were standing. The lurid glare of the fire had barely given place to the inky darkness that seemed to follow it when a voice shouted:

"It is the Englishman that has set fire to the store! He is in the wood hard by; I am certain he is there. I saw him plainly; let us get him!"

A volley of execrations arose at these words, and were quickly followed by another volley of a very different kind; for bullets came whistling and pinging all around me; I threw myself on the ground.

"Run!" I said to the Hottentot and Masoja; "you can be of no use to me now, and they will thrash you both to death if they catch you."

They dived into the bush, and I heard them breaking their way through. It is all up, I thought, and I determined to sell my life as dearly as I could; and in this mood I waited on the ground, with my revolver in my hand. Fool that I was! My idle curiosity had undone me. I might have known that some lynx-eyed Boer must have seen me where I stood. For some seconds the bullets continued to whistle over my head, when a voice shouted:

"Why waste good cartridges on the Rooi Nek?" (red neck, a nickname given to all Englishmen). "There are six of us here, and he has no rifle; let us surround the bush and put the dogs in."

"Ja, ja, good!" yelled another, "let the dogs go in, and we will hunt him like a jackal!"

"Come, Heer Landrost," said another voice, "you are the visitor, so put your dog in first."

"Silence!" said some one, "do not call me by that name."

"Let us first go and have a soupee," another said, "I have a case of gin on the waggon."

"Ja, ja, that is good," shouted three or four at the same time.

"But the Rooi Nek will get away," said the first speaker.

"Never fear!" yelled another, "the dogs will soon catch him, and it will be better sport," and there was a general laugh all round.

The men had been drinking hard, and a few more glasses of that vile gin, manufactured not a thousand miles from Pretoria—and which, under all sorts of counterfeit labels is circulated as the genuine article through the length and breadth of the Transvaal—would soon make madmen of them.

To be shot down by a band of infuriated, drunken Boers, would be bad enough; and as I thought of the cruel murder perpetrated at Edson's Hotel, on the Crocodile river, I had little doubt but that they would execute their intention—for why should they not? Up to this present day the murderers of that unfortunate man have never been brought to justice; nor, as far as the outside public know, has any redress ever been demanded by the British Government for the dastardly deed! To be literally torn to pieces by half-savage

Kafir dogs, would be even a worse fate. To try and get through the bush and take to the path or country would simply mean certain capture. In a second I made up my mind. Wriggling stealthily away, until I was certain I could no longer give a view, I walked rapidly towards my old hiding-place. A large tree rose up almost from the brink of the spring, and I was soon perched in its lower branch, some twelve feet from the ground. Here I waited the course of events, fully determined to make a stand to the last. Perhaps when they had got over their drunken fit, they would be more amenable to reason; but for the time there was no better course to take. It would be sheer folly to walk out and give myself up. In their present frame of mind I knew it would be simply suicide—so I waited.

From the shouts and yells, intermingled with loud bursts of rude laughter, it was clear they were plying themselves with an extra amount of Dutch courage; and the more they took the more secure I felt. At last I heard the bark of a dog, and concluded the time for the hunt had come. I had a good look at my revolver; it luckily was a six-shooter, and I had a couple of spare cartridges in my pocket.

I heard the party hurrying down towards the wood. They must have soon reached the spot where I had been lying, for the dog began to bark and whine, and I knew he had found my trail. He was still on the leash, and could hear their cries of, "sar, sar" (a South African term used to hiss on a dog). Then I heard them shouting out their arrangements as to how they were to advance; then with a sharp yelp I heard the dog rushing through

the brushwood, and knew that he had been loosened on the prey.

Hardly before I could realise it he was below me, barking furiously, and making savage springs at the tree. It was not his fault, he was only doing the bidding of his masters; but there was nothing for it—I took deliberate aim and fired. He fell without a sound, my aim had been true, and he lay dead on the ground below me. I jumped from my perch, and lay down close to him. The shot had the result I anticipated; the crashing noises I heard on all sides suddenly stopped; my would-be assassins had not bargained for any danger to themselves, and at once checked their advance.

The Boer is a very brave man as long as he is shooting at a long range from behind cover at an enemy who cannot see him, and with his pony close behind him, ready to scamper off at a moment's notice if he thinks he is himself seen; but had he to advance on a hidden foe, it is quite another thing. In fact, he never does it, but invariably thinks discretion is the better part of valour. So it was with these brave patriots. Instead of advancing, I could hear them beating a hasty retreat, for they took to their heels and ran, and had I only possessed more ammunition, I should have increased their speed by firing a shot at random.

"I thought you said the Englishman had no rifle?" I heard a man shout; "he nearly shot me, and then what would my vrou have said?"

"How could he have shot you, when he shot the dog?" came an answer.

"But I saw the fire," said the first speaker. This conversation was yelled out evidently for my hearing—was it a ruse? I was not to be caught. Lying flat down by the dog, presently the expected happened. They had got to a safe distance and behind cover, and now a regular fusillade was kept up on the little copse.

The bullets rattled overhead, but did not in the least alarm me, as I was lying behind a slight rise in the ground at the back of the tree. When they had finally to their own minds settled my account, they retired to the waggon and gin bóttle again; and as the night grew later, some of them actually burst into song, accompanied by the strains of an old wheezy concertina, on which instrument most Boers can perform—after their idea of music. By degrees the songs got fewer, the concertina was laid aside, and the agreeable compound supplied by the distillery already alluded to had its usual result; the whole party were wrapt in a drunken sleep, from which they would not wake for many hours, and when they did, their aching heads would remind them for the rest of the day from whence their liquor had come.

I had little fear that a soul of the merry party would be awake, but for all that I determined to reconnoitre with the greatest caution. I accordingly traversed the wood in the opposite direction to that in which I had entered it, crossed the path, and after making a detour, arrived opposite my waggon. Not a soul stirred. As I approached the waggon, I caught sight of several sleeping forms lying beneath it, and from the continuous snores they were giving vent to, I had no doubt they were

some of the party. Going down on my hands and knees I crawled cautiously along. I was surprised at not being greeted by a bark, but the dog I had settled must, after all, have been the only one at the disposal of the party.

"They are very drunk," I thought, for I had caught sight of a gun, or rifle, leaning against the wheel of the waggon—and if a Boer takes care of anything, it is his rifle. I rose boldly to my feet, advanced, and seized hold of it, when, much to my delight, I found it to be my own rifle. A half-empty bandolier of cartridges was lying on the ground near it; this I appropriated, then a thought struck me—if I could only possess myself of the fire-arms these men had with them, for some hours at least I should be master of the situation.

I lifted the waggon sail; there, sure enough, two men were sleeping, and stretching out my hand in the dark I grasped the butt of another rifle. I drew it cautiously out; one of the men grunted something in his sleep, but there was not the least danger of awakening him. I was on the point of giving up my hunt for more arms, when I caught the glitter of the moon on the brass butt of another weapon, lying under the waggon near the sleepers. I pulled it gently away, and after turning out the gin from a half-emptied flask wended my way on to the path, and once more started on my journey.

CHAPTER IX

AN ENGLISH GIRL

MAKING a rough guess at the time, I calculated that it would be about two o'clock in the morning; this would give me about three hours before daylight. An active man can go a good way in three hours. The Boers would be certain not to rouse out of their drunken slumber until seven or eight; this would give me three hours more. But the papers and the waggon!—no, I must find out where its destination was to be, there was nothing for it, I was obliged to remain in the vicinity. I stood still and thought for a few moments.

If I remained on the veldt the dogs would be sure to track me. No, I must take to the water; this would put them off the scent.

With my three rifles slung across my shoulders, I retraced my steps towards the drift I had crossed near the first house. In less than an hour I had passed the homestead and reached the brook.

I crossed it, walked for about a hundred yards up the road, then turning to the left, struck into the bush once more, and made my way to the water below the ford. Wading up stream I once more passed the drift, but

this time in the water, and kept on up for about two hundred yards. Then mounting the left bank, I took up my abode beneath a huge yellow-wood tree, which as the crow flies could not be more than fifty yards from the solitary house, but on the opposite bank, and separated from view by a dense tangle of trees and undergrowth. Here I decided to remain, at any rate for that night, and just as the dawn was breaking I coiled myself up, and prepared to get as much sleep as I could under the circumstances.

I was wakened by some one singing, but this time it was not the monotonous chant of a Kafir, or the drunken howl of a Transvaal Boer. A clear, fresh, girlish voice, that rose and fell with the sweetest cadence, none of your operatic twists and twirls, but just a plain, simple melody. I knew the song well, I had often heard it before—

> "Hurry along, sorrow and song,
> All is vanity 'neath the sun,
> Velvet and rags, so the world wags,
> Until the river no more shall run."

Who could this girl be, and where had she heard that song?

Surely it could not be Lucy Hanton? But no; I dismissed the thought—impossible! I was told for certain to go to the Woodbush village.

She seemed to be walking between the house and the brook, possibly taking advantage of the shade the overhanging trees afforded from the noonday sun; for I judged it must be about noon, and I had had a good sleep.

Her accent was so good she must be English, for she had not even the colonialisms that are so easily detected.

"Mimmie, come here, we must eat," said a sharp, shrill voice, which I recognised to be that of the old woman I had seen the night before.

"Ja, tante," said the girl; then addressing her dog, which up to that moment I had not known she had had with her, she said in English: "Come, old boy, you seem to be very busy sniffing about here to-day." The animal gave a bark as if he understood her, and I heard her retreating towards the house.

About sundown I heard the distant rumble of a waggon; it came nearer and nearer, and I could soon distinguish the voices of men. From the sound, I knew it was coming from the direction of the late store, and I recognised my friends of the night before; but this time their jollity seemed changed into ire. Nearly every sentence that these so-called Christian people used was interlarded with a curse. Things had evidently not been going well with them.

"Heer Landrost," said the man whom by his voice I recognised as Hans, though I had never yet succeeded in seeing his face, "what can I do to those Kafirs if I catch them?"

"Whatever you like," said the upholder of the law in Middelburg.

"Then I will sjambok them first, and hang them after," replied Hans, with a curse. "I will teach the black devils to steal rifles!"

"Do not be too rash," said the Landrost, "you might get into trouble."

"But you have told me, Heer Landrost, I can do what I like."

"Ja, ja," said his worship, "flog as much as you choose. Viljoen, the field-cornet (a kind of coroner and sheriff combined, a position generally given to an influential Boer) and Landsberg, the district surgeon, will make it all right for that—but leave the hanging alone," and in this calm manner the chief magistrate of Middelburg advised the virtual flogging to death of natives.

They entered the house, and a minute later I heard the girl give a cry. "No, no, Heer Landrost, you must not," she almost shrieked.

"Indeed, you ought to be proud that the Heer Landrost takes so much notice of you," said Hans, with a rude laugh. "Give her another, Heer Landrost." I heard the dog growl, and immediately after the girl was running down to the drift.

"Let her go," said Hans; "she will come back soon; she must eat like the rest of us. Come," he shouted to the old woman, "make haste, I am hungry, good tante, and the others will soon be here. I hope they catch that Englishman, and if they have found the Kafir and Hottentot, why—we shall have some sport to-night!"

The quiet solitude of the place and the stillness of the evening made every word as audible as if I had been standing in the room, for the doors and windows were wide open, otherwise it might not have been so easy.

At what seemed only a few yards from me, I could

distinctly hear the sound of weeping, and I knew it must be the girl. Every now and then she would speak to the dog, and more than once I caught the words: "Never mind, old boy, you at least are a friend." What was I to do? I dared not move, or I was sure to be heard; any moment the dog might find me out. I did what others would have done who did not want to be discovered—I lay still, and did nothing.

By-and-bye the short twilight glided into night, the stars shone out overhead, but still at intervals I could catch a sob. At last she rose, and wended her way towards the house, and almost at the same moment I heard the approach of horsemen, and concluded it must be the rest of the party of the night before. They soon arrived at the house.

"We have found nothing of them; there is no sign of the Englishman, but the dog is there, dead enough. Field-cornet Viljoen came up and put his dog on the scent, but the stupid brute came running this way, as if the Rooi Nek would be such a fool as to walk back into the lions' den, so he called him off. He and Long Piet have ridden on a bit up the path, but are coming here later." All this was more shouted than spoken by the man Koos, in the high-pitched voice so often to be heard amongst Boers.

"Off saddle and come in," said Hans, "we are hungry."

I removed my boots, and slid down into the water, and waded another hundred yards up the stream, then took to the opposite bank, and, rifle in hand, crawled

very cautiously in the direction of the house. The other two weapons I had dropped into the stream and carefully covered with stones, so that not a vestige of them was to be seen. I soon caught the glimmer of the light through the trees, and crept within fifty paces of the path. The thick mass of foliage above me made my hiding-place pitch dark, but the mere fact of the darkness I was in showed up to greater advantage the house and its surroundings. The waggon had been drawn towards the left side of the building, the swinging lantern was lit, and as the sail was drawn up, I could not mistake the interior—it was mine. The oxen had been outspanned, and it was clear the journey was not to be continued that night.

Through the half-open door of the house I could plainly distinguish the assembled company, who were seated round a rough table, without cloth or any appointments. Both the old woman and the girl were flitting about helping the men, after the Boer custom, which does not allow the women folk to sit down at the table until their lords and masters have finished their meal. They are then allowed what remains, which they eat off the dirty plates, whilst their masters sit round and smoke their rank tobacco. Up to the present the women had not arrived at the point of sitting down, nor was it likely for some time that they would; for when their labours ought to have been finished, three more companions turned up.

They consisted of Long Piet, whom I now recognised as the young giant, and two other men, one of whom, tall, broad-shouldered, with a short black beard and

stern face, I soon discovered was Viljoen, the field-cornet.

These three worthies sat down, and began attacking the food set before them, whilst the others went on with their pipes. The girl, I noticed, looked very tired, and studiously kept as far away as possible from a man with a very gaudy tie, much beflowered waistcoat, and heavy gold chain, whom I judged to be the law-giver of Middelburg—the very man to whom I had written for succour only a week ago! At last I caught sight of his full face, and I do not think I ever saw a worse expression in my life—cunning, cruelty, avarice, with a mixture of cant and hypocrisy—all seemed mingled into one; no wonder the girl shunned him. My conjectures were right as to his personality; for, being addressed as "Heer Landrost" by one of the new comers at the opposite side of the room, he turned his "Pecksniffian" face to the speaker, saying: "What do you want with me, Viljoen?"

"You live in the great world, Heer Landrost," said Viljoen (Middelburg, with its eight hundred inhabitants, would be quite the great world in the eyes of most Boers), "and must therefore know a good deal of what is going on."

"Ja, ja, that is true," said his worship with a look of pride.

"Then what do our people think of the new Governor at the Cape? I hear it said he is a determined man, and that our President has given orders that the Uitlanders must be looked to a little better."

"Ja, ja, that is also true," said the Landrost; "I have

received such instructions, but"—and I suppose he winked at the assembled company, for there was a laugh—"we all know what that means."

"That may be," said Viljoen; "but I do not want to lose my billet as field-cornet, and for the present at least intend to act up to my orders."

"Truly, you are right," said the magistrate. "When the sun is too hot it is always better to be on the shady side of the kraal."

"That is what I thought," continued Viljoen. "I have had a letter from Pretoria, asking me to make all inquiries about an Englishman who was lately reported in the Middelburg paper as having been drowned in the Groote Olifants river when crossing, and said to have been buried by you, Hans Van der Merwe; and that is the reason, Oom Hans, that brought me over to see you."

"Quite correct," said the man addressed in my hearing for the first time as Hans Van der Merwe—and my heart gave a great bump when I heard his name—"I buried him close to the drift."

"That is fortunate," Viljoen replied; "I can easily ride over, and in a few minutes a pick and shovel will certify to what you say."

"Why, what do you mean?" said Hans; "cannot you take my word? Why all this fuss about an Englishman?"

"Of course I can, Oom Hans; but, you see, the day after the report of the drowning appeared in the Middelburg paper a man named Hallimond wrote at once to headquarters in Pretoria, saying he knew for a certainty

that the man was not drowned, because he had received a letter from him after the accident was supposed to have happened, telling him his voorlooper had been murdered, and his driver had run away; that he had been attacked, and asked for assistance. This man Hallimond, with about a dozen Rooi Nekers, has, I hear gone to look for him, and for all I know may be at the drift now. Here is my order from Pretoria, so you see there is no way out of it"—and he handed a paper to the Landrost, who scanned it closely, and then, with a very pale face, gave it back to him.

There was a dead silence in the room; not a man spoke.

"Why! what is the matter?" asked Viljoen; "you all look as if you had seen a spook!"

The silence was first broken by Hans. "Come," he said, "there is still some gin in the house, though a terrible lot was lost in the store last night. Go to bed, women," he continued, "go and sleep in the waggon; it is better there for you to-night."

The two women passed out of the house, entered my waggon, and pulled down the sail.

A bottle of gin, with pannikins and mugs, was placed on the table, and Viljoen crossed the room and entered into close conversation with a man whose back I only saw, but judged to be the noted Hans, whilst the rest of the party betook themselves to the bottle and said little.

CHAPTER X

THE MURDER OF VILJOEN

ALL this conversation had been so clear that I had not lost a syllable; but now that they had practically given up their general speech, and Hans and Viljoen appeared to have their heads very close together, talking in subdued voices, I concluded it was about time for me to move my quarters. I had discovered a great deal. This then, was the noted Hans Van der Merwe!—but who could the Englishman be that had been drowned, and buried near the drift?

There certainly had been no other grave there when I left it a few days ago, except the one I had dug myself for the mortal remains of my voorlooper, January. Suddenly it flashed across me. I, for some reason or other, was the Englishman referred to—of course I was! Why, Hallimond was the very man I had written to! and thus reflecting, I was in the act of crawling away when two figures appeared at the door. They strode right out into the moonlight—they were Viljoen, and Hans Van der Merwe! Could I believe my eyes! There was no doubt about it; Hans Van der Merwe was none other than the stranger whom I had met before crossing the Olifants river drift, whom I saw watching me after I had crossed, and who had given me such

implicit instructions to "keep to the right." What could it all mean?

For a few seconds they stood at the open door, then deliberately crossed the path in my direction as if they had seen me. When they got beneath the shadow of the trees that fringed the path, they both came to a standstill within twenty paces of me.

"I do not like the business," Viljoen was saying; "suppose it leaked out afterwards?"

"Tush! there is no fear of that," was Van der Merwe's answer. "Landrost du Toit will go with us, and his evidence with yours will be quite sufficient."

"But was there no Englishman after all? and if so, why did you send that letter to the Middelburg paper?"

"Look here," went on Van der Merwe, "if you must know the truth of it, there is an Englishman in this matter. He is not drowned but, from the information I have received, I have very good reasons for the time being for keeping him out of the way."

"What! you do not mean to murder him?" said Viljoen, "for I will have nothing to do with that; and mind you, Hans Van der Merwe," he said sternly, "if I thought you had done so, I would arrest you on the spot."

Hans was quiet for a minute, then said:

"You quite mistake me; such a thing is far from my intention. I simply want him out of the way for a few weeks. You know the Landrost is to be married again shortly; well then, until after his marriage."

"But what can this Englishman have to do with our Landrost's marriage?" asked Viljoen in surprise.

"That is my secret," said Hans, firmly. "Some day

you shall know; but it is necessary this Englishman should be put away until it comes off."

"Where is he?" said Viljoen.

"You have been hunting him with your own dog," was the reply.

"What! do you mean the rondlooper (tramp) I was told had been near the store last night? What can a tramp have to do with the Landrost's wedding?"

"I did not say he was a tramp."

"But the others told me he was, and that is why I put my dog on his spoor (trail). If he is not a tramp, what is he—and where is his waggon? I should like to have a look at him."

"Oh! his waggon was not far from here yesterday, but I do not know where he has gone to, though he is not with his waggon now."

It was pretty plain to me that Viljoen was not in any way implicated in the robbery of my waggon, oxen, and goods—in fact, had known nothing about me, nor would have known anything, had it not been for the instructions he had received from Pretoria to see if the statement made by my friend, Hallimond, was correct or not. He seemed to be a blunt, straightforward sort of fellow, and I was glad to find that amongst this race of hypocritical humbugs there existed one who bore the semblance to an honest man.

"But," went on Viljoen, "how do you propose to keep a man with a waggon and oxen, and, I suppose, a couple of Kafir boys from going where they like?"

"I can arrange with Magato's people to take care of him for a few weeks."

"Magato's!" said the other in surprise, "why, it would take him five weeks to get there!"

"Oh, no! it would not—only about as many days."

"How so, Oom Hans? I have treked into Zoutpansberg myself, and know how long it takes. No double span of oxen would trek it in five times five days."

"I did not say he would trek there," said Hans, whose temper was rising.

"Then, what will become of the waggon and span of oxen?" asked the other man. "No, no," he continued, "I will have nothing to do with it, Hans Van der Merwe; besides, you seem to be on too friendly terms with the Magato rebels, the people who for years have never paid a tichy (threepenny piece) of hut tax, and laugh us to scorn whenever we ask for it. Look here! I am off, and, if you take my advice, you will keep out of this matter. You are not in Delagoa Bay or Mozambique. There, I hear, it is not much to kidnap a man, at any rate a black one, for many have worked for me who get to Lorenço Marques in that way. Take care! Of what I have now heard I will say nothing; but mind, if anything happens to an Englishman in the district of which I am field-cornet, I shall go right into the matter, and, if I find it is laid at your door, I shall do my duty," and he strode away.

In two minutes he was on his horse, and I heard him quietly jogging homewards.

For a few seconds Van der Merwe remained in the same position; then he let forth such a torrent of curses and abuse on the head of his late companion, that it is a wonder he did not choke, for it was all under his

breath. "We shall see," he said, "we shall see," and, crossing the path, he shook his clenched fist in the direction of the rider, and passed into the house.

"Where is Viljoen?" I heard the Landrost ask.

"Gone home," replied Van der Merwe, his voice trembling with passion, "and may the devil go with him! Come, let us get to bed, those who are going to sleep here."

I thought I would remain where I was for a little longer, and ruminate on what I had heard, when Van der Merwe suddenly appeared from the back of the house. He carried a rifle in his hand. Going to the rude shed which formed the stable, some forty yards off, he shortly emerged leading a pony, and jumping on its back, started at a hand canter in the same direction Viljoen had taken; he rode at the side of the path and made little noise. Ten minutes later I heard a shot, and whilst I was wondering what it could mean, Van der Merwe returned, put the horse in the stable, and re-entered the house from the back.

. . . . . .

The long hours of darkness had passed away; the stars had gradually grown paler and paler, and still I sat under the tree to which I had crawled after the disappearance of Van der Merwe into the house, pondering over the strange news I had become possessed of that night. I wondered where Hallimond and his little troop of Englishmen could be, those brave fellows who had left their daily occupations to come out and seek me. I daresay they would be near the drift now, would see the grave, and feel con-

vinced that, after all, the paper report was true; that, by accident, I had predated my letter, and, after having erected some rude token to my memory, they would return to Middelburg with the firm conviction they had seen the last of me. But, on the other hand, Hallimond would want to know what had become of my waggon. No; I felt sure they would not give me up in a hurry. Oh! if I only had a horse! Even on foot I might possibly manage to get away; but supposing Hallimond's party were not at the drift, I should be worse off than before.

Then the papers in, or rather, under the waggon, I could not lose sight of. The girl, too—I was almost certain in my own mind, that she was Lucy. No, there was nothing for it; I must remain where I was, to watch the waggon, and try and get speech with the girl if possible.

So the early morning wore away, the sun already shot fierce rays through the branches above me, the little brook gurgled on, and I composed myself to doze away the rest of the forenoon. It was still comparatively early. No sound of any one stirring came from the house; the Boers are generally very early risers, and I wondered at their tardiness. At last I heard a sound, but it did not come from the house. Some one was riding at a breakneck gallop towards it. The rider drew rein, sprang from his horse, and a second later was thundering at the door, shouting with all his might for the inmates to make haste.

"What do you want making all this noise, as if the bush was on fire, or old Maleuw had risen from the

dead, and was coming down upon us with a thousand of his black-skinned devils?" roared Hans Van der Merwe, as he threw open the door. "Ah! is it you, Bodenstein," he went on. "What is the matter, man? Why, you look as white as goat's milk! You can't have seen a spook, as the sun has been up this two hours?"

"No, I have seen no spook," said the man, "but I have seen what is worse!"

"Worse! what do you mean?"

"A dead man, Oom Hans!—a dead man, I tell you! and no other than our good neighbour and field-cornet, Viljoen!"

"What!" said Hans, in a tone of surprise, "Viljoen! why, he was here last night! Could he have died so suddenly, then? Why did not his vrou send for some of us when he was taken ill?"

"It's little she knows of it," said the man, "for he is lying dead on the veldt, not a quarter of a mile from here, shot dead, I tell you, Oom Hans, shot dead through the back of the head. I was coming along to visit, when my horse reared, and there I saw him lying at the side of the path. I dismounted at once and looked at him, but he is quite dead."

"This is bad," said Hans, without expressing the least surprise at the early visit of his friend, for it is a Boer custom to call and drink coffee just after sun-up. "Heer Landrost!" he shouted, "come with us; there has been bad work last night!"

"What is the matter?" said a sleepy voice.

"The matter is murder! But come, there is no time to talk!"

"Allermenser!" ejaculated the Landrost, and as Boers, when retiring to rest, seldom remove more than their coats and boots, they were soon on the way indicated by Bodenstein.

As all this had been spoken in a high, excited key, hardly a word had escaped me, and at the risk of being discovered, I stealthily crossed the brook, crept through the undergrowth, and once more took up my old position of the night before. Though I could see into the house, and hear as distinctly as if I formed one of the party, the deep shadow and dense undergrowth in which I lay, I felt pretty sure, would screen me from even the keen-sighted Boers, especially as they never would dream I could be lurking so near them. My advance had been further aided by the bustle and noise that had proceeded from the house immediately Hans and his party had left it, and I had the satisfaction of hearing the other men depart in the same direction. The shrill wailing of the old woman, kept up at regular intervals of a minute, had also considerably aided my plan. The girl appeared quite silent, and I almost thought she had gone with the rest of the party, when I caught a glimpse of her as she came for a moment to the open door, then quickly retired into the house, with her faithful companion, the dog, at her heels.

I soon heard the party returning, and saw that they carried the body of a man in their midst. They arrived at the house and entered it; then the whole of the men returned to the front, some sitting on a rude bench outside, the others squatting about, all smoking, and saying very little to each other. Shortly after a couple

more arrived, and then they began trooping in by twos and threes until, within an hour of the arrival of the first man, there must have been some twenty to thirty men about the building. I had no idea there were such a number in the vicinity, and the Hottentot was right when he said there were many.

Soon a Cape cart drove up; two women stepped out followed by three children, two little girls and a boy, all weeping bitterly.

The way the children grouped themselves round one of the women, proved her to be the newly-made widow. Short as had been the notice, they were already in deep mourning. These people have such a love for the gruesome, that it is indeed rare that the women folk have not a funeral garb to deck themselves with. The men, on the other hand, are content to put a piece of crape round the arm and smasher hat.

As they neared the door they were met by Hans Van der Merwe, hat in hand, and conducted into the house. Sobs and groans, with piercing shrieks from the women, were now all that could be heard for the next few moments, while the men outside looked stupidly at each other and smoked.

Another trap arrived, drawn by six horses. This was a kind of covered waggonette, three or four seats being arranged in tiers behind each other, and capable of carrying about a dozen people. A handsome coffin was taken from it to the house.

This did not cause me any surprise, as most Boers of the old school take a great pride in their coffins, and keep them in their houses for years.

In about an hour, the coffin with its contents was returned to the waggon, the women entered the Cape cart, and, escorted by the men on horseback who rode at each side of the vehicles, except Hans Van der Merwe and the Landrost, who, as principal mourners, rode just behind the Cape cart, moved off at a slow trot in the direction of the burnt store, in the vicinity of which the residence of the murdered man must have been—vicinity in this country meaning within five or six miles.

As they rode by, it went from mouth to mouth, "It is the Rooi Neker or the Hottentot and Kafir who have done this."

"Ja, friends," said Hans Van der Merwe, turning round. "Truly it must be the Englishman whose deed this is; we must find him!"

"Truly, truly," many of them answered, at the same time shaking their sjamboks and fists in the air.

In a few minutes, except for an occasional burst of grief from the old woman who was sitting on the bench outside, rocking herself to and fro, not a sound was to be heard. The girl seemed to have disappeared; she evidently was not in the house, but I had not seen her leave it.

CHAPTER X

LUCY HANTON

I CREPT quietly back to my hiding-place, but not so quietly that I had not been heard; for scarcely had I crossed the brook when a deep growl caused me to turn round, and standing looking at me from the opposite bank was the big dog I had seen with the girl.

"Poor old boy," I said coaxingly. The dog pricked up his ears and looked at me; the words evidently seemed familiar and friendly, for he wagged his tail. "Come, boy, come," I went on, and I took out a piece of biscuit and showed it to him. He immediately began to bark as loud as he could, and to spring about on the bank; it might have been his delight, but it was not shared by me. A shrill voice called out:

"Mimmie, Mimmie, what is the dog barking at?"

"He is not with me, tante," said the girl.

"Then go and look for him; you know he never barks for nothing."

"Dodger, Dodger, Dodger!" cried the girl, but the dog only redoubled his barks, and I heard her footsteps as she went down the little path towards the spruit.

The dog heard her, too, and ran down to meet her, but barking and looking back as he did so.

"What is the matter, old boy?" said the girl; "why are you barking?" But the dog only answered with a sharp yelp, and kept running back towards me.

I heard her picking her way up the side of the brook; in a couple of minutes she would be up to where I stood. Here was a dilemma! What was I to do? Would she scream if she saw me? I at once made up my mind. Dropping my rifle, I stepped quickly out with my hat in my hand, and my finger on my lips.

She started when she saw me, and I thought she would cry out, but with a great effort she controlled herself.

"Do not be alarmed," I said quietly; "I am a friend, and do not mean you any harm."

"Are you the Englishman they are all talking about?" she asked.

"I believe I am that man," I replied.

She started back with a look of horror. I knew what she was thinking of.

"Do not be frightened," I said. "They say I murdered Viljoen, but I am innocent of that crime, though I think I know who did."

"Then why are you prowling about here like a robber, and not giving the man up to justice?"

"Because, in the first place, I want to catch some thieves, and in the second, there is no fit person here to demand the right of justice from—unless you think Heer du Toit, the Landrost, is worthy of the trust."

"I hate him!" she said fiercely, and her eyes sparkled and the colour mounted to her cheek.

"And yet you are going to marry him?"

"I marry him? I would rather die first!—but you seem to know more of me than I could expect from a stranger."

"A great deal more than you think," was my reply, "but there is no time to waste now—the old woman will be suspicious; but if you will trust me, and come here again at six this evening, I will tell you more."

She looked at me steadfastly for a few seconds, then stretching out her hand said: "You look honest, and by your speech I can tell you are a gentleman. I will trust you, and come at that hour if I can." Then she and the dog turned, the latter wagged his tail as he passed me, and I knew I had made another friend.

They picked their way slowly down the bank of the little stream. I heard her ascend the path and enter the house. The old woman grumbled out something about the dog, but I did not catch the girl's answer, and then all was still.

I lit my pipe and sat down to wait. Each minute of that long day seemed to lengthen into hours, and each hour into days. But all things must have an ending, and, true to her word, about the appointed time, as far as I could guess, I once more heard a light footstep on the bank of the stream, and in a few minutes the girl with her dog companion stood before me. She carried a blanket over one arm, and a large parcel under the other.

"You see," she said, looking straight at me, "that I

am trusting you. I have brought you this blanket and something to eat; you must be hungry, and the night dew cannot be good for you, for you do not appear to have a waggon. I had to go out at the back of the house, and take a turn round the cattle kraal, or Tante Sanie might have seen me. You need not mind taking the blanket," she went on, looking at it; "it is one of my own that I brought from Pretoria, and as for the food, it is a small matter." I thought so, too, as through the half-opened piece of paper I recognised some of my own cheese.

"Now," she said, "what have you to tell me, for it is evident you know something of me, and I have little time to wait? Oom Hans and the others may be back at any moment, so be quick."

"First of all, that I have been robbed by your Oom Hans."

"Robbed!" she cried.

"Yes, robbed. The waggon outside your house is mine, also the oxen that brought it there, and all that it contained, and a great deal more than it now contains."

"Why," said the girl, her cheeks burning hot, "he said he got it from an Englishman!"

"That is quite true; he did get it from an Englishman, for he got it from me—at least, he took it and did not pay for it. Now listen to me," I went on. "The whole of your future life may depend on that waggon; it seems strange, but it may. You must never lose sight of it; wherever it goes you must find out; if it is repainted, you must know of it. In fact, you must look upon that waggon as if it were your very existence."

She stared at me. I guessed what was passing in her mind.

"No, I am not mad," I said; "do not think that its loss has caused me to be light-brained, but remember what I have told you—all may depend on that waggon for your future happiness."

I saw that she believed me. "Cannot you explain?" she went on; "what can all this mystery be about a waggon?"

How I wished I now had the papers with me, but at present they were as inaccessible as if in the strong room of the Bank of England.

Suddenly she started. "I hear them returning," she said hastily, "and I shall be missed."

"To-morrow morning, if possible," I said.

She waved her hand, and without a reply disappeared from my view.

CHAPTER XII

THE RE-APPEARANCE OF DR EVANS

I HEARD the party return, but it now seemed to consist of two or three people only, and they made very little noise. I was tired, and thought I could do no good by again approaching the house; besides, on the morrow I might require all my strength and energy, so I determined to have a good night's rest, and, thanks to the blanket the girl had brought me, there seemed no reason why I should not obtain that refreshment. So, after a hearty meal, I rolled myself up in the blanket, and did not awake until the sun was high in the heavens. Almost as if by magic, the girl with her dog stood before me.

"Now, what is it you have to tell me?" she asked, "but be quick whatever it is; the men have gone over to the old store, and are sure to be back in half-an-hour. I could not come sooner as Tante Sanie kept me. Here is some coffee," and she handed me a small tin billy with the steaming hot beverage.

"Thank you, Lucy," I said; "it is kind of you."

She started.

"How do you know my name is Lucy?"

"Now, listen; I know all about you. I was your poor

father's friend; my name is George Leigh. I stood at his death-bed not eight weeks ago, and there I made him a solemn promise that I would not rest until I had found you, and that I would be your guardian and protector until such time as you might wish to leave my home to enter on the duties of the mistress of your own."

"My poor father!" said the girl; "but I never knew him."

"I know that," I said; "but he repented deeply for having treated you so ill; but believe me, Lucy Hanton, for that is your real name, his last dying wish was that you should return to England with me. I have a house in Devonshire, and there you would reside with my aunt and youngest sister, who is not very much older than yourself."

"But my name is not Hanton," she said.

"I knew what you were going to say," I went on, "your name is Lucy Eyre; that was your mother's name, and the name under which Mrs Schneider took you."

"You certainly seem to know a great deal about me, but what proof can you offer me of all this?"

"I have plenty of proof, Lucy, but at present it is in that waggon."

"In the waggon! how dreadful! It is going away to-day; but where could it be in the waggon?"

"That is my secret. But where is the waggon going?"

"To Middelburg, and Tante Sanie and I are to go in it."

"To Middelburg!" I said, in surprise.

"Yes, to Middelburg," she said, wringing her hands. "I know it is the Landrost who is doing it. Oh! do

save me!" she went on, as she caught at my arm; "they want to marry me against my will to that awful man, and now we are to live in a cottage near his house. Oom Hans told me I am to be married in six weeks, on his return from the Woodbush village; can you not stop it? I am not generally a coward, but I fear him so much. I believe you were my father's friend! Oh! do take me away!"

"That is not an easy matter now, Lucy. You see my waggon is taken, and I am alone; what can I do against such numbers? But look here," I continued, "have you any writing paper?—but never mind, this will do," and I tore off a piece of the paper in which she had brought me the provisions the day before. Luckily, I had my pencil with me, so I hastily scribbled a short note to Hallimond, telling him of my situation, and asking him to keep his eye on the girl until I came to Middelburg, and that if I did not arrive within four days, he would know that I had either been done away with, or was forcibly kept out of the way for a time. I told him to listen to what Lucy said, as she would be able to tell him a good deal.

"Now," I said, handing her the piece of paper, "mind you do not lose this. You will give it to my friend, Hallimond, when you get to Middelburg. You say Oom Hans will be away, so there will be nothing to prevent you. You must pretend to the old woman that you are quite reconciled to your fate, so she will give you plenty of liberty. Go to the Standard Hotel, and ask the landlord for Hallimond's address, he will give it you. If he is not in Middelburg, write to his address at once.

Say that George Leigh told you to write, and that you must see him without delay. Mind you explain where and when he is to meet you. I shall come to Middelburg as fast as I can. And now, good-bye, for I hear them returning. Keep up your heart, and mind you do not lose sight of the waggon, or at any rate, always know its whereabouts."

"Good-bye, Mr Leigh," she said, the tears rising in her eyes, "good-bye." She took my hand, held it for a moment, then vanished with her dog as quickly as she had appeared.

"Where have you been to, Mimmie?" said the old hag. "I have been hunting for you everywhere. Come, look sharp; get the things into the waggon; we are to start at noon. Truly, you English are lazy. It is well our men always name the slowest ox in the span, 'Englishman,' for was there ever such a lazy people!"

The girl did not answer.

In the meantime I heard the party ride up and then a man's voice say, "Not ready yet? Well, you must go without your things. I cannot wait. Hans told me I must be across the drift to-morrow, and I am going to do it. Ho! there, Matches," he yelled; "bring up the oxen to inspan, and look sharp, or you will get a taste of my sjambok."

"Ja, Baas," came the reply, and I knew it was a native driver or voorlooper. In less than half an hour I had heard the heavy waggon rumble away, and was left to my own reflections.

. . . . . .

Middelburg! Well, there was nothing for it; I must

get to Middelburg too. But how? I did not know the way the Hottentot had intended to take me; besides, there were so many dangers in that direction. The whole of the country-side was up against me. No; I must get back the way I had come. It would be madness to move out in daylight, so I determined to remain where I was until dark, and then take my chance. It was lucky the girl had given me the food, for my stock of biscuits was getting low; however, I was provided for for the next three days, and then I must trust to luck.

The afternoon wore on, and about five I heard some men arriving. They stopped at the house for a few minutes only, and then rode away. Thank goodness! they did not cross the spruit, and so were not going to the drift, for I heard them returning the way they had come.

At last the sun sank to rest, the short twilight came on, and in a few moments it was dark. I strapped on my haversack, shouldered my rifle, and cautiously took my way to the place where the little stream crossed the road. No sound of any living being caught my ear, and I stepped quickly out into the darkness, made more dark by the overhanging trees. All that night I kept on, and had almost reached the top of the kloof when a lighter colour in the eastern sky told me of the approaching day. It wanted but another mile to put me on the main track for the drift. I had determined to get there before seeking a suitable place to rest, when something I caught sight of speedily induced me to alter my intention, and diving into the bush, I was soon some hundred paces in its depths.

As I turned a corner, scarce a hundred yards ahead of me stood a waggon, and I concluded it was none other than the one that had left for Middelburg the day before.

I soon had no further doubts, for the shrill voice of the old woman called out, asking the driver "Why the coffee was not yet ready? and that it was time to trek." In another twenty minutes the oxen were inspanned, and the waggon was rumbling on again. I followed cautiously through the bush, keeping in a line with the party.

When they neared the top of the kloof I heard a shout, and climbing a few feet up a tree, so as to get a better view, saw two mounted men on the top of the rise. I watched them until they joined the waggon, and then plunging deeper into the bush, struck off to the right, so as to reach the main road some distance in advance of where the waggon would turn.

Although by doing this I cut off a considerable angle, the bush being thick my progress was slow; and by the time I had arrived at the main path, running at right angles to the one in which I had first seen the waggon, the deep furrow of the wheels told me that it had already passed. In a short time I again came in sight of it, and followed at a safe distance for some three or four miles. The country now became more open, so I decided to remain where I was until the evening, and then to continue my tramp.

Twilight had fallen when I heard a cavalcade riding hard in the direction the waggon had taken. They went past my hiding-place at a good round canter, but it was too dark at the distance I was from the road to

distinguish them. Somehow, as they sped on, I once or twice thought I caught a short sentence in English. I was certain I heard one real British ejaculation as the horse of one of the riders stumbled. Should I shout?—but, as I speculated on it, they swept on and were soon out of hailing. They had seemed quite a big party, and might have been a dozen or so. Far, far away I could still hear the thud, thud of the horses' feet.

I crept quietly out and continued my journey. On, on I tramped, hour after hour. I knew that a very few more miles would put me on the banks of the Groote Olifants river, where I had first met with my mishaps. It must have been very early in the morning, the sky was just a little lighter in the east, when I caught the sound of the mighty river. I was within a hundred yards of my old camping-place when I saw the glimmer of a fire. I approached very cautiously, skirting round the bush by which I had lain on the memorable night of the attack. A waggon was drawn up on nearly the identical spot where mine had been, and a Cape cart, to which I could see four horses were tied, was standing within a few yards of it. Presently a voice said, in good round English:

"I feel very cold, so shall get up and tell the nigger to make some coffee."

"Thank goodness!" I said to myself; "friends at last" and walked hastily up to the waggon. A man descended from the cart at almost the same instant. I advanced towards him, but ere I could utter a word, I was felled to the ground by a tremendous blow, delivered from behind. Two heavy bodies fell upon me, and before I

could realise what had happened, with my hands and legs securely bound, and a cloth shoved into my mouth, I was pitched into the Cape cart. With feverish haste, the four horses were inspanned, and, without a word, two men sprang in, one being a Boer, whose head was covered by a red pocket-handkerchief fastened over his slouched hat, and thus obscuring his face; the other, a filthy, cunning, low-bred-looking Bushman. As we turned the horses' heads, I saw a figure wrapped in a big overcoat standing near the waggon. Although half stunned, I caught a glimpse of his face, and, as the horses dashed along at breakneck pace in the exact direction in which I had just come, I racked my aching head as to where I had seen it before, when, suddenly, it flashed across me, if it was not Dr Evans, who had attended poor Dick Hanton, then it was his ghost; and, with this firm conviction I lay back and made myself as comfortable as any man in my position might be expected to be.

The dawn had already broken. Still on, on, at full gallop we sped. The two men who were sitting in front of me did not exchange a single word. We must have gone at least ten to twelve miles when the cart took a sharp turn to the right on to the veldt. Both men jumped out. In less than a couple of minutes the light leathern thongs and breast-plate that constitutes the South African harness, was thrown off, and the panting, foaming steeds were being led quietly up and down by the Bushman. Then, for the first time, the handkerchief was removed from the smasher hat, and disclosed the strongly marked features of Hans Van der Merwe.

CHAPTER XIII

HANS' CART, AND WHAT I FOUND IN IT

THE cloth that had been crammed into my mouth had fallen out, and lay at the bottom of the cart.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded, looking at him—I was going to say "Hans Van der Merwe," but checked myself.

"Why," he answered in very good English, "can I be mistaken?—No, I am certain you are the rondlooper who set fire to my store."

"Your store!" I replied; "what store? Who are you, and how could you dare to treat me in this manner? Remember we have a Governor at the Cape now, who will make you account pretty dearly for this."

"Then you don't know who I am?" he said, and a smile of satisfaction crossed his face.

"How should I know?—but I do know you have no right to treat me in this manner."

"You do not speak like a rondlooper," he said. I saw for some reason he wanted to reconcile me, and also thought that I was not aware of his identity. "But who are you?" he asked. "Why, I think I have seen you before. Did you not pass me near the drift on the

Groote Olifants river some days ago? But, man, how is it you are in this condition?"

"I am that man," I replied, as a thought flashed through my mind that it might be to my advantage to keep up the deception of ignoring who he was.

"Well, friend," he said, "this is a strange plight to find you in; but come, let me undo those reims, and over a cup of coffee you shall tell me your story," and he began unloosening my bonds, cursing himself all the time for having been so stupid as to make the mistake.

I had half a mind to draw my revolver, which I still had in my back pocket, and shoot him on the spot, so indignant did I feel at his treatment; but the angry passion passed away, and I could see that, for some plan of his own, he wanted, for the time being, to get into my good graces. Seeming to comply with his wish might also serve my purpose, so I went up to the small fire which the Bushman had already kindled, and sat down by it. He followed me and filled his pipe.

"This is a strange business," he said. "Allermenser! to think that I should have taken you for a rondlooper that we were all looking for. I thought I had got the man who had killed poor Viljoen. But come, the coffee is ready. Give the Groote Baas a cup of coffee," he yelled to the native, who with a sly, covert smile on his face was standing some little distance off.

"Ja, Baas; coffee for the Groote Baas," said the man as he filled the enamelled tin cup and brought it to me. Van der Merwe rose to his feet and went towards the cart.

"You would like some meat," he said, "I have some very good bultong" (sun-dried meat). He called the

native to him, saying in a loud voice, "Take that to the Baas," as he handed him the meat. Even in the short time they stood together, my sharp ear caught a low whisper, but it was so low that any one not on the *qui vive* would not have noticed it.

"Make haste, you black devil!" roared Hans.

"Ja, Baas Hendrick," the man answered, and I knew at once that Van der Merwe had managed to convey to the sharp-witted Bushman that he was to be addressed as Hendrick, and not Hans.

"Now we will talk," he said, as he followed his servant up to the fire; "but, friend, I am sorry for this business."

During the short time they had left me, I had formulated a plan, and determined if possible to put it into practice, so I made up my mind to try how diamond would cut diamond. I had arrived at the conclusion that he must in some way have discovered the object of my visit, and had some great interest at heart to prevent my accomplishing it before Lucy was duly married to the Landrost.

No; it was quite clear the only way to act was to let him think that he was deceiving me, whilst in reality I was deceiving him; so for the next few minutes I chewed at my bultong, ate some biscuit, and sipped my hot coffee, and by the time I had filled my pipe out of his tobacco bag my plan of campaign was complete.

I told him as rapidly as possible about the attack on my waggon, the loss of my driver and voorlooper; how, later on, I had been made a prisoner in my own waggon by some Boers; that I had escaped, and hidden myself in the bush, and had travelled on in the dark; then hid

in a wood from whence I had seen a store burning. I had escaped from there, and finally I had managed to find my way back as far as the drift, when I met with my adventure with him. During the whole time of my recital he kept up a running commentary of ejaculations, expressing astonishment, indignation, and pity.

"You have had a bad time, friend," he said; "but how came you to be so long on your way back?" and he looked keenly at me.

"The country is strange to me, and I had to wander a good deal."

"But did you not hear any people about?" Hans continued.

"I both heard and saw some pass me yesterday, about dusk, but they appeared to be the same party who robbed me of my waggon." I saw a faint smile steal over his features as I spoke. "But come," I went on, "do you now believe what I have told you? If so, do you want to earn one hundred pounds?"

"One hundred pounds!" he said, throwing up his hands as if in great astonishment; "why, where would you get such a sum?"

"Never mind, I can get it, and more, if you will help me," and I watched him keenly, for I knew that his next words would betray whether or not he was playing for a far greater stake.

"Yes, one hundred pounds, if you can help me to find a girl."

"Well, you English are queer people! but I see you are in earnest. Of course I will, if I can; but who is the girl, and where does she live?"

"She is an English girl, and her guardian is a man named Hans Van der Merwe, and I hear she lives with him and his wife in the Woodbush village."

"That is very easy. I know her well, and Oom Hans too; she is a nice girl—but mind, that one hundred pounds is a bargain."

"If you help me to find her within a week, I will make it three hundred."

"That may or may not be," he answered, and his next words assured me that for the time being he would gladly pay double that amount to keep her from me, having a very much greater game at stake.

"The girl is in the Woodbush village," he said; "it will take you five or six days hard driving to get there from here, as the roads are bad. I can go there with you, but mind," and he looked slily at me, "perhaps she is at Magato's," and he whispered the last word; "you might have to go there to get her."

"At Magato's!" I said, with well-feigned surprise, "why, what can the girl be doing there?"

"You see, Oom Hans goes to Magato's sometimes."

"Magato's! the rebels, the men who hate the Boers, and will not pay a ticky (threepenny-bit) hut tax! You astonish me!"

"I suppose Oom Hans thinks all men must live, and you know," he went on, lowering his voice as if to prevent the slightest chance of the Bushman hearing him, "Magato's people want many things;" and he made a sign as if to imitate shooting, and I knew at once he meant "gun-running."

"Very good; if I have to go to Magato's, well I must

go there; but how is it you speak such good English?" For as he got more excited, I noticed he had almost lost all the everyday expressions of the Boers.

"When I was young I went to the South African College in Cape Town," he replied, "and have been in Kimberley a good time."

"And your name is?" I asked.

"Hendrick de Villiers," and I now saw that he thought he had completely baffled me; and in another half-hour we had resumed our journey.

For the next two days we journeyed on, Hans Van der Merwe, or de Villiers, as he now called himself, striving in all manner of ways to make himself as agreeable as he could. I knew my only chance of success was to fall in with him, though I loathed to do it, as I was almost sure the murder of Viljoen lay at his door. He really was not as old as I had at first taken him for, and his grey hairs were premature. That he was clever, there was little doubt, and from his conversation it was quite evident that he had at times, probably in his younger days, mixed in good society.

Our journey took us through some of the most lovely scenery of South Africa, and as we passed along the splendidly wooded country, with here and there an open glade, or sparkling, running stream, by the side of which we would eat our meals, it seemed difficult to realise the desperate mission I had taken. We had a shot-gun in the trap, and occasionally Van der Merwe brought down some wild fowl to add to the larder, but though we often saw buck, we never got near enough to get a shot at them, and my rifle, whether accidentally

or on purpose, had been left on the ground when I was kidnapped. He might have had another rifle in the box that formed the back seat of the cart, but I noticed he always took good care I did not get a glimpse of its contents, when he had occasion to take provisions out of it. Had the journey been taken under different auspices, it was all that could have been desired. On the fourth day, a little before sundown, we sighted a waggon. The veldt was pretty open, and it must have been about two miles off, when it first came in sight. Suddenly, without saying a word, Hans, who was driving, took a turn off the path, and went in a straight line towards a small clump of bush, about a quarter of a mile away across the veldt, to the right.

"There is better firewood over there," he said, pointing to the place with his sjambok, "and we shall want big fires to-night as we are right in the lion country."

"Then would it not have been better to have driven on to the waggon? You say you have no rifle, but they are sure to have one."

"Lions are too fond of oxen," he answered, "we are better away from them." I knew this was only an excuse, as a lion is just as fond of a horse as an ox, though, strange to say, he prefers a donkey to either, but as it was evident he did not want me to get to the waggon, I did not push the matter.

We had no sooner outspanned, when he told the Bushman to go and collect firewood, and saying he would himself go down to the water with the horses, he put his gun on his shoulder, and started off in the

direction of the distant waggon, which I could see had also taken up its quarters for the night.

Darkness had set in, yet he did not return, nor had the Bushman put in his appearance with the wood. The veldt is a lonely place at any time, but to be left on it on a dark night, when you have just been informed that you are in the heart of the lion country (which information I knew to be correct), and especially when the only defence one might offer was a small pocket revolver—then it is more than lonely. A brave man does not place himself in such a predicament if he can help it; it is only the action of a fool, or of one who has never really known what it is to face the king of beasts.

It was clear that Van der Merwe had for the better protection of his horses taken them to the waggon, and he no doubt was sitting by one of the many fires that surrounded it, recounting his experiences to an admiring Boer of how he was duping a cursed Englishman.

It was also plain that the Bushman had followed the example of his master, and I daresay he too was giving the driver and voorlooper his idea of what was taking place, and of how the Groote Baas Hans was so slim (sly). I could picture it all to myself as I sat in the cart puffing at my pipe, it being as I thought the safest place to be in, not that it was very comfortable for now that the dessel-boom (pole) no longer supported by the horses was lying on the ground, the seat on which I was sitting was at an angle of forty-five degrees. However, I sat on and smoked, and watched the distant fires.

I think I must have been half asleep when I heard a shot, and then another and another followed in rapid succession. I started up. "This won't do," I thought, and I put my hand down to the locker at the back with the intention of trying to force it, when, to my astonishment, I found that Van der Merwe had actually forgotten to replace the padlock, and that it was open.

I lifted the lid, and almost the first thing I put my hand on was a carbine. It was a sporting Martini, just fitting the box, and close to it lay a bandolier of cartridges. I whipped them out, slipped in a cartridge, and sat quietly listening for all I was worth. There were no more shots, nor did I hear anything that might cause alarm, so I composed myself to pass the night in the position I had taken up. As it might be imprudent to court sleep, the best thing I could do to keep myself awake would be to eat, especially as I had had nothing since mid-day; so I once more opened the locker, and began to grope about in it with my hands.

I came across a tin of sardines and some biscuits; then I remembered I had seen Van der Merwe use a tin-opener. I again dived into the locker, when my hand touched a bundle of letters. Would it be right under the circumstances for me to look at them? I struck a match, held it down into the box, and was at once convinced that I had every right to read them, for the first envelope that caught my eye was addressed to myself. In a twinkling I had the packet in my hand. After completely draping the trap round by hanging our sleeping blankets over it, and lighting a candle, in spite of lions or any other prowling animals, I untied the

packet, took out the first letter, the envelope of which had already been opened, and settled myself down to read. It was from Harper, and ran as follows:—

"22 LANGTON ROAD, W.
30*th May* 189—

"GEORGE LEIGH, Esq.,

"DEAR SIR,—I have to acknowledge receipt of your cable from Capetown, advising me to forward all letters "Poste Restante," Middelburg, Transvaal, and I herewith enclose you two letters that have been lying at my office for the last two or three days.

"I shall look forward to receipt of news, advising me that you are bringing home the daughter of my late dear friend and client.—Yours faithfully, ROBERT HARPER.

"*P.S.*—Since your departure, news has reached me of the death of Miss Hanton's grandfather. At the eleventh hour he appears to have repented of his harsh treatment of his daughter, for he has left her, or her heirs, the whole of his enormous fortune, which, from the information I have been able to obtain up to the present, will amount to some millions of dollars; so take great care of her, and bring her home soon. As the son of my old friend, John Leigh, I am sure you will acquit yourself of the trust that has been placed in you.

"I have also heard, that the man poor Dick's wife had been intended for by her father, was shot in a gambling saloon some months ago. R. H."

The first part of the letter had been written in the flowing round hand of a clerk; the postscript, far more important, was in the handwriting of Harper himself, and I well knew the crabbed scrawl.

The two letters he mentioned I could not find, but there was another one from Harper which must have come by a later mail. It simply hoped that I was on the point of returning with my ward, and was fit and well. *En passant* he mentioned that he had met Dr Russell

a few days after my departure, and when questioning him about his assistant Dr Evans, had been informed that, much to the surprise of the old practitioner, his assistant had suddenly left for South Africa, saying that the death of a near relative required his immediate presence there.

"It appears," continued Harper's letter, "that he actually sailed the week before you did. I mention this, as you might probably drop across him in your wanderings."

The next letter was from Henri de Kock, saying that he had sold the two oxen for seven pounds each, but that the fourteen had not yet come to Middelburg. When they did, however, he would have them immediately sent on to Standerton, where they should be sold. He also mentioned that he had paid the money for the two over to Du Toit, the Landrost, who would remit it in person. The letter was addressed to Hans Van der Merwe.

The next thing to come to hand was a large blue envelope, evidently containing something of importance, and it had never been closed. It was notarially drawn up, duly stamped, seamed, signed, and witnessed.

Being in Dutch, I easily made myself master of its contents, and it was nothing more or less than an agreement between Hermanus Jacobus Van der Merwe, on the one part, and Paulus Johannes du Toit on the other part, that in consideration of value received, six months after the marriage of the latter to an English girl, described as Lucy Hanton, *alias* Eyre, and now known as Mimmie Schneider, that he, the said Du Toit, should pay the said Van der Merwe, the sum in cash of five thousand pounds, and a further sum of five hundred

pounds per annum for life, meaning the life of Hans Van der Merwe, and that on the day of the marriage, as security for the payment of these monies, the said Du Toit should hand over to the said Van der Merwe, his transfer on the two coal farms, Welstand and Boschkrantz, in the Olifants river district, and also a bond over his three erven in Pretoria. The witnesses were Henri de Kock, and Piet Naude, and the notary, Jan Berange.

"No wonder he wants to get me out of the way," I thought. But there were other letters, and in one from Du Toit he complained that Van der Merwe had not signed the last Kafir pass with red lead pencil, and that if he himself had not been in the office when it arrived, his clerk might have opened the letter that the Kafir brought.

There were many other letters, but all seemed to be connected with the sale of cattle, and I was tying up the bundle when I noticed I had dropped a paper on the bottom of the cart. I picked it up; one glance told me what it was. It was the order to Field-cornet Viljoen, from headquarters in Pretoria, to solve the mystery about the grave on the banks of the Groote Olifants river.

CHAPTER XIV

I BUY A HORSE

I TIED up the bundles of letters, and putting them in the exact place where they had been before, sat and thought. That Van der Merwe was a bigger scoundrel than I could have thought existed in the whole of the Transvaal was now quite evident, but that there were others almost equally as bad as he, was also a certainty, and I thought of the Landrost and De Kock, and was now pretty sure that Dr Evans must in some way be mixed up with them as well. There was no longer any doubt that it was he I had seen when I was kidnapped; it was no hallucination but a real fact. What was to be done? The more I pondered the more hopeless my position seemed to be. An idea struck me. I would write to Hallimond. True, I might not get a chance of forwarding the letter, yet an opportunity might offer, and I was pretty confident I should not get another chance of writing. I had whilst rummaging in the box seen a few sheets of foolscap and envelopes, I soon had them out, and by the aid of the fast expiring candle, I wrote as follows:—

"DEAR HALLIMOND,—If I have not returned to Middelburg by the last day of this month, you must at all cost and risk, induce the person to whom I confided a message to you on a piece of brown

paper, to leave Middelburg with you at once for some border town, either in Natal or the Cape Colony, and when placed under safe protection, you will wire the whereabouts to me, *poste restante* at the following places—Middelburg, Pretoria, Barberton, Krugersdorp, and Durban. I am in great peril, but do not follow the spoor, as it may make matters worse. G. L."

I made two copies of this. One I directed under cover to the landlord of the Standard Hotel, Middelburg, instructing him to lose no time or expense in getting it forwarded to its destination; the other, for the time being, I left unaddressed. Trusting to luck, and putting them both in my digger's belt, which I had still managed to conceal under my ragged shirt, and which contained the little ready money I had started with, I replaced the things in the box, and removing any trace of candle-dripping or crumbs that might have betrayed my having been sitting in the cart, I took down the blankets that surrounded it, stepped out; rolled myself up in them, and in spite of lions or anything else that might come my way, was soon fast asleep under the cart.

I was awakened by hearing some one near me. It was still dark—not so dark but that I could make out a form, which from the breaking of twigs I judged to be the Bushman occupied in kindling a fire.

"Halloa!" I said, "where have you been, you rascal? and how is it you left me with no fire and nothing to eat?"

"The Groote Baas Hans—Hendrick," he said correcting himself, "wanted me to cut forage for the horses, and I could not get back before this; I was afraid of the lion."

"What lion?" I asked.

"Did not the Groote Baas hear the shooting?"

"Yes, but what of that?"

"The lion came near the fire, and Baas Hans," again he corrected himself with Hendrik, "and the other two Baas shot at it."

"Well, lion or no lion, you found your way here, so you shall find it back. Go and tell the Baas Hendrick that I must eat, and must drink coffee."

"The Groote Baas sleeps now," said the man.

"That matters not; go, I am hungry!" and jumping out from under the cart I added to his alacrity, for he started off at a sharp run in the direction I had sent him.

It now occurred to me that when I had picked up the padlock that fastened the locker it appeared to be out of the common. Could it be possible that it was one of those that closed with a spring, but only to be opened with a key? Immediately the man had got out of sight I jumped into the cart; passing the padlock through the hasp, I pressed it hard, it gave a snap, and, to my great relief, the box was locked. I scrambled down, and once more betook myself to the blankets.

I had not long to wait before I heard my fleet-footed messenger returning. He seemed very submissive, and besides a loaf of coarse Boer bread and a tin of corned beef, had some coffee, and half a flask of gin, which he said his master had sent specially, and that he would be with me an hour after daylight. I immediately set to work on this provender, as if I had not tasted food for a week, and now felt quite sure that I had disarmed all suspicion.

About an hour after daylight Van der Merwe put in

his appearance. He was very affable, quite regretted that he had been unable to return the night before, and was, as he said, just on the point of setting off when the lion appeared, and his friends persuaded him to remain with them, as they were frightened for their oxen.

"But you heard the shots?" he said.

I answered in the affirmative, though I felt pretty sure that the whole plan had been arranged, which I afterwards discovered to be correct.

"I am sorry to say," Hans continued, "that I find I shall be unable to accompany you to the Woodbush village, as I had intended, for I have received important news from my friends at the waggon that compels me to return at once to Middelburg; but I have made arrangements for you, if you want to get on at once," and here he smiled, as if he knew I did. "My friend has a very good 'salted' horse, just the sort of thing you will require in the Low Country, should you have to go there, for, as I have already told you, on your arrival at the Woodbush village you may find that Hans Van der Merwe is not there;" and here he turned away, probably to hide a smile; "and then your only plan is to follow him to the Magato's stronghold. If you ride hard you ought to get to the village by sundown to-night. I will let the Bushman go with you, and remain here myself for the day; my friend at the waggon has a pony he can ride, and the Bushman knows the way well; he can be back again by daylight to-morrow morning. It would be too much work for my horses, if they have to start on a long journey to-morrow; so now, what do you say?"

"I suppose there is no other way; but what about a guide to Magato's, should I find that Van der Merwe is not there?"

"I will also arrange for that," was the reply. "My Bushman shall take a note to a friend of mine who will do all you require; of course there must be payment; Boers will not work for nothing."

"How am I to manage that? Do you suppose I walk about the veldt with the Standard Bank in my pocket?"

"I will make that all right; your paper will do, for I know you are rich."

"How do you know that?" I asked sharply.

He coloured for a second, and then as quickly replied, "A man does not go about the veldt offering from one to three hundred pounds for the finding of a girl if he has not plenty of money!" and he laughed.

"Very good," I said, "be it so; you bring the horse, and I will look at it, or I will come over with you."

"No, no," he answered quickly, "I will bring it," showing he did not want me to visit the waggon. "But I'll tell you what you can do," he said, as he beckoned to the Bushman to follow him. "Write me out a Promissory Note that, in the event of my finding the girl you want, you will give me one hundred pounds. Here are pens, ink, and paper," he continued, as he opened the box in the cart, and, after producing them from a small wallet I had not noticed the night before, as carefully locked it again.

I took the articles he handed me, and, getting under the cart, spread my paper on the ground, and began to

write. He watched me for a few seconds with greedy eyes, and then went off with the Bushman in the direction of the waggon.

"Ah! my friend," I thought, "you are not going to have such an easy journey back as you had here!" and, after watching them go for some distance, I cautiously raised myself and secured a small screw-driver that lay with a miscellaneous collection of screws in a small box at the bottom of the cart; then, returning to my old position, before a quarter of an hour had passed I had removed the majority of the screws that held the boss of the wheel to the axle. Putting the screw-driver back into the box, and taking all the screws, I threw them into the bush, where there was very little danger of their ever coming to light again. I reckoned that before he had proceeded five miles, and had crossed the first drift, one, if not both of his wheels, would be off the axle, and, without screws, there was no means of putting them on sufficiently safely for him to proceed beyond a snail's crawl on such a road.

It had taken us four full days from the Olifants river drift to get where we were. We had certainly not done less than thirty-five miles a day. There was at least another seventy to eighty miles from the drift on to Middelburg, making in all about two hundred and twenty miles; and I could not help smiling when I thought of the predicament he would find himself in, and the almost certainty of not meeting with another cart, for the road we had come by was very little used by vehicles of a light fabric, and for the matter of that, was seldom used by any one, especially at that season.

I now returned to my task, and before Van der Merwe and the Bushman had returned had written out the document he required.

Van der Merwe was leading a stout thickset-looking nag of a little over fifteen hands. It had a half-sleepy look about it, which is not at all uncommon amongst horses that have gone through the horse sickness which at certain seasons of the year is very prevalent in the Zoutpansberg and Waterberg districts. A horse that once gets over it is called "salted," and this greatly enhances its value, as it is then supposed to be impervious to another attack. So deadly is this sickness that, in most cases, well-fed animals will succumb to its malignant influence in the course of a very few hours. I had had experience in this matter before, and was pretty sure of the correctness of Van der Merwe's statement, and felt more convinced than ever of the hurry he was in to get rid of me. I afterwards learned why.

A cheap, well-stuffed saddle, with a gaudy saddle-cloth, which latter article Boers greatly delight in, was on its back, and the usual single rein, with Bedouin bit and curb, decorated the head over the untanned head-stall. I examined the animal carefully, and after the South African manner of testing its paces, leapt into the saddle, and giving it its head started at a hand canter in the direction of the outspanned waggon. I heard Van der Merwe roaring after me:

"Come back, come back; there is no time to lose, or you will not reach the Woodbush village to-night;" but I made no sign of hearing him, and as I neared the waggon, I saw a Boer jump out of the back, and

seizing a native near him, throw him bodily into it, drawing down the sail; but not before my keen eyes had recognised the man whom I had condemned in my mind as having stolen my two front oxen, and murdered my voorlooper, January—my driver, Basket

The Boer came rapidly towards me, quicker than ever I had seen a Boer walk, for when not in the saddle, they almost invariably slouch.

"Good-day, friend," he said as he came up; "do you like the horse?" And without waiting for my answer, and pointing in the direction I had just come, "See, Oom Hendrick is in a hurry; he wants you to start soon, or the Bushman will not be able to get back here by to-morrow morning, so that he can go on his journey with Oom Hans." He said the word Hans, and then looked at me as if he wanted to correct himself, but I pretended not to notice it. I turned and looked, and at a good distance off I could make out Van der Merwe hurrying towards me at a far greater pace than I had thought him capable of; I noticed that he carried the carbine in his hand, so I quietly turned the horse's head, and walked back to the cart. As I did so, I could see that Van der Merwe turned too, and that he tried as much as possible to hide the weapon he was carrying. I purposely walked very slowly, and saw him get into the cart, and then jump out again; in two or three minutes I walked up as if I had noticed nothing. He was standing near the trap looking very hot and red.

"There is no time to lose," he said rather gruffly, "if you want to reach the Woodbush village to-night;"

then correcting his temper with an effort, he continued in a smooth, suave voice, "you have not signed the paper."

"Oh! is that all," I answered; "give it to me, and I will do it at once."

He passed me the pen, and putting them on the splash-board of the cart I fixed my signature.

"Now, how do you like the horse?" he said, as he put the papers I had just given him in his wallet. "The Bushman has made some coffee, and you had better eat, as you have a long journey before you, and whilst you are having breakfast, he shall go and fetch the pony he is to ride, and we will talk about the price of your horse."

A minute before he had been all haste that we should start at once, and I waited to see if he would expedite matters by telling the Bushman to ride over to the waggon on the still saddled animal, but this was not the case; and after saying a few words to him in an undertone, the man started off on foot. I sat down near the fire, poured myself out a pannikin of coffee, and helping myself to a slice of bultong and some biscuit, started my breakfast as if I had all the day before me.

Most Boers when they have anything either to buy or sell, talk about anything else but that nearest to their thoughts. I knew this, and acted as if I had forgotten all about the horse. Van der Merwe watched me as my breakfast disappeared; he did not utter a word, but smoked on at his pipe. I could tell from the short puffs that came and went that he was getting impatient, and wanted me to open the conversation, but I was equally

determined that he should do so; so I ate steadily on. At last I heard the Bushman returning; then Hans spoke:

"That is a good horse, a very good horse!"

"It is not bad, but I have ridden better."

"Not in the Zoutpansberg district, for there is nothing to touch it."

"Is that so?" I answered, and lit my pipe.

"Now, look here," said my companion, as he gazed up at the sun, "the day is already late, and you must be on your journey; what will you offer for the beast?"

"I am the buyer; it is for you to mention the price."

"There is not a better horse in Zoutpansberg; the saddle and bridle are also good; shall we say one hundred pounds?" and he looked greedily at me.

"What! a hundred! Do you think I am a fool?"

"Well—let us say eighty-five."

"I will give you my paper for fifty pounds, and not one penny more."

He sat silent for a few minutes, then said, "Very good, but I see you have made your other paper payable in two months; that is rather long. Let us make them both payable in three weeks?"

"You have not found the girl yet, and considering the handsome sum I am offering you, and the good bargain you are making on the horse, I do not see that you have much to complain of."

"It is a long time to wait," he answered, but it was evident he wanted to get me on my journey at any cost, so he assented with a bad grace. I wrote him out the requisite paper, strapped on my haversack, which I had

still managed to retain during all my adventures, and leaping into my saddle, without even giving him the usual Boer shake of the hand, before he was hardly aware of what I was doing, I rode smartly away. A few minutes later I heard the little pony with its Bushman rider cantering behind me. He was soon abreast, and turning sharply to the right, so as to avoid the waggon by about half a mile, we rode quietly on.

As we got to a bend in the path, I looked back. Van der Merwe was still standing near the cart, the bright sunshine glistening on the barrel of the carbine he held in his hand. Had he been suspicious of my conduct at the eleventh hour? I did not know, and the next moment a dip in the road hid him from sight.

CHAPTER XV

WOODBUSH VILLAGE

THE Bushman and I pushed on rapidly, and at every step of my beast I felt I had not made a bad bargain. Had not Van der Merwe been in a hurry to get me out of the way, I have doubts as to whether he would have made such a low sale; for though horse-flesh is cheap enough in the Transvaal—the average price ranging between eight and fifteen pounds—still a "salted" animal of the description I rode was well worth the money I had given, without the addition of saddle and bridle.

The country got wilder and wilder, for we had altogether left the beaten track, and were making our way across country; but the Bushman did not falter for an instant, so keen is the sense of locality in his race; he rode on as if we were on a turnpike road bristling with finger-posts and mile-stones. We had ascended to the top of a grassy rise, and were giving our horses a blow, when the man pointed with his finger to a distant hill, which, as the crow flies, appeared to be about fifteen miles off. "Groote Baas," he said, "the Woodbush village lies on the slope of that."

I looked at the sun; it was past noon, but the

foaming mouths and streaming sides of the horses showed how they had been pressed, so I decided to off-saddle for an hour. In no time the saddles and bridles were off, the horses knee-haltered, and the Bushman was busying himself in collecting some dried twigs to make a fire for the inevitable coffee. There was water hard by, and the tin billy was soon bubbling on the fire.

I had finished my meal, and the Bushman was regaling himself with the remainder of my tin of corned beef and some biscuit, when suddenly he started up.

"Look! Baas—look!" he said excitedly, as he pointed with his lean finger to the side of a small hill that lay about three hundred yards to our right. I did look. For a second I could not make out anything; then my heart gave a great bump, for, calmly surveying us from the side of a low bush stood two lions, one a male, the other a female. They were, without exception, two of the largest specimens I had ever seen.

The horses had wandered down towards the water in the direction we were going. Without a moment's hesitation I grabbed up my saddle and bridle, and rushed towards my horse. Like the sagacious animal he was, he calmly waited for me, with his head erect and foot in the air, as when knee-haltered the head is brought down to the knee. In a trice I had the bit in his mouth; never did man girth up quicker, and, slashing the rein that formed the knee-halter with my knife, I jumped into the saddle. The Bushman had been as quick as I, and as we tore down the slope towards the level country a terrific roar told us that

the chase had begun. Up to the present our two animals had been unaware of the near presence of the enemy, but that awful sound put wings to their feet, and we seemed to fly.

One false step by either of the mounts would mean almost certain death to itself and rider. Luckily, where we were the ground was free from boulders and fairly open, but here and there was dotted with the stunted, thorny, iron-wood tree. The danger lay in the grass, which, being more than a foot high, quite hid from view any ant-bear holes, sudden dips in the ground, or the smaller ant-heaps that are almost invariably dotted over the surface of the South African veldt. Now and then I could hear a deep, low growl, and knew the brutes were gaining on us. Twice my horse stumbled, and almost threw me, but I kept him up with my heels. Then a slight rise stood before us, and I thought it was all up; still my gallant beast struggled on. I topped it—to find the way barred. A huge sheet of water surrounded by long rushes and flags, known in South Africa as a vlei, or pan, lay in our direct front. The Bushman was close behind me; the foremost lion must have been within thirty yards of him; there was nothing for it. I gathered my horse together beneath me, and rushed right through the flags and rushes, and a moment later was in deep water. I knew the Bushman had followed my example.

I felt my beast sink below me. I kicked my feet out of my stirrups, and the water closed over my head. Still clinging to my bridle, I struck out, and the first noise that greeted my ear on reappearing to the surface

was the savage roars of disappointment and rage of our pursuers. At the same moment I caught the sound of many animals breaking through the rushes and making for the banks of the pan, and a few seconds later had the huge satisfaction of watching our late enemies hotly pursuing a herd of small antelopes that must have been taking shelter from the heat, or quenching their thirst. The Bushman, like the rest of his race, was an expert swimmer, and, with his pony, was bobbing about near me.

"Allermenser! Baas, I was nearly done for," he said, as I looked at him.

"We had better get out at the other side of the pan," I replied.

It was perhaps a little over a hundred yards across, and we accordingly swam there. The horses were so frightened it was with some difficulty we got them to go ashore; however, with a little coaxing and patting, they eventually did. We did not waste a moment, but bore away to the left to join the main road that led direct to the Woodbush village.

The sun had already set when the few twinkling lights that we now and then had a glimpse of told me that we were nearing our destination. In another half-hour we reached a straggling kind of street, most of the houses being of wood, but there were a few galvanized iron shanties. The Bushman informed me that our journey had ended, and that this was the Woodbush village; then, preceding me, he led the way up the road, and finally stopped before a larger house than any we had passed.

"This is the house you are to go to, Baas. It is the winkel and canteen of the Groote Baas Hans Van der Merwe; it is here that Baas Hendrick has sent me."

Through the open door, by the light of an oil lamp that hung from the wooden ceiling, I could make out the interior of a fair-sized room, at the far end of which a rough kind of bar was erected, with a background of shelves, ranging one above the other, displaying bottles of many shapes, intermingled with tins of corned beef, sardines, salmon, etc.

Behind this counter stood a buxom-looking woman of about forty. She was not dressed after the Boer style, for in place of the ugly black kind of sunbonnet usually worn, she had a great quantity of hair piled up on her head after the latest Johannesburg fashion. She must at one time have been rather good-looking. She wore a red blouse and short sleeves; a huge gold brooch fastened the blouse beneath the chin. Her arms were adorned by some half-a-dozen gold bracelets, and innumerable rings sparkled on her fingers. I put her down to be a Cape Colonial, which I afterwards discovered she was. Two men were leaning over the bar-counter talking to her; one, tall and dark with a black beard, and dressed in a white cotton suit; the other, a much slighter man, in a kind of semi-military or police uniform. He had a supercilious look, and kept playing with his moustache and imperial, for he adopted the French style. It was certain that, in his own estimation, he was a very important personage.

At a small round table on the right sat four men. The numerous beer bottles before them, their loud

talk, and louder laughter, and the cigars they smoked, proclaimed them to be what they were—Hollanders by birth, and Transvaal officials by occupation. You will not find a Boer paying four shillings a bottle for beer, but these harpies, who besides being well paid by their Government, will scarcely do a hand's turn for an Uitlander without exacting tribute, or taking a bribe, can afford to squander their money—not that they ever do it on anybody but themselves, unless perchance it is on a stranger, as a sprat to catch a whale.

"There must be something stirring in this dead-alive hole," I thought, as I turned my horse's head towards the stable, followed, as I supposed, by the Bushman. I always make a point of seeing my beast well provided with a meal before attending to myself, and not leaving him to the tender mercies of a Kafir groom. I knew how well he merited my attention, and with my own hand, before preparing to leave the stable, I rubbed him down with a wisp of straw. It must have taken me some ten minutes to a quarter of an hour to settle him comfortably for the night, when, on returning to the road, I found the patient little beast ridden by the Bushman still standing on the exact spot where I had left him. The man was nowhere to be seen, so I took the pony, and after seeing a native groom cut him a good supper, returned towards the canteen. As I was about to enter it, the Bushman came out.

"Why don't you look after your horse, you scoundrel?" I said.

"Ja, Baas," he replied, and disappeared into the darkness.

I entered the room. At a glance I saw that the

woman had gone, and the two men who had been talking to her had joined the noisy party at the table.

They all stared at me as I went in. I heard one of them say in an undertone, "He looks like an English tramp," and the man in the semi-military uniform cast a very contemptuous glance in my direction.

I certainly could not have looked very prepossessing; my clothes were practically in rags, and still wet from the ducking I had had that day. However, I did not take any notice of them, but walked straight up to the bar counter. I waited a few minutes, but nobody came. I tapped on it with my knuckles, and was about to knock at a small door to the left of the room, when it opened suddenly, and the woman I had first seen appeared. As she saw me, she hastily put a letter she was holding in her hand behind her back, and surveyed me from top to toe. Before she could speak, I asked her in English whether she could give me a bed and something to eat.

"Yes, if you can pay for it," she said sharply. I did not answer her, but put a sovereign on the counter. She took the coin, opened the till and threw it in, locked it, and placed the key in her pocket.

"You can have a tin of salmon, some bread and cheese, or biscuits, but it is too late for the boy to cook now. You will have to eat it here," she went on, "for I only allow gentlemen in the sitting-room," and with another contemptuous look, she walked up to the men congregated round the table.

I half made up my mind to leave the house, but thought I might possibly not be able to find another.

As for being too late for cooking, I could plainly hear frizzling going on from where I stood. I sat down on the only remaining chair in the room, and waited patiently for my meal. Meanwhile, the men at the table kept casting covert glances in my direction and laughing, and every now and then I heard some remark about my appearance, each time becoming more audible.

Still no food came. At last my patience was exhausted, so addressing myself to the table where the woman sat with her back towards me, I said:

"Will you tell your servant that I want something to eat?"

She did not take the slightest notice of my question, nor did the men, except to laugh.

I rose from my seat, and going to the door by which she had entered the room, opened it, and called at the top of my voice for the boy.

A thick-headed, stupid-looking native appeared.

"Where is my food?" I asked, addressing him in Kafir.

He stood with his mouth open and looked at me, then remarked: "The missus has not told me."

Without any more ado I shoved him before me, passed through a small room, and then into a kitchen. A frying-pan was on the wood fire; two or three chops were in it. I seized a fork, and as I prodded them out the landlady—for such I judged her to be—entered with the fellow in the semi-military get-up at her back, and I could make out that they were followed by the rest of the party.

"How dare you interfere in my house?" she said in English.

I did not take the least notice, but continued gnawing away at my capture. On a side-table I saw half a loaf of Boer bread; this I instantly pounced upon. She poured out a volume of abuse in English and Cape Dutch, and the men from behind kept pushing forward.

The man in the uniform suddenly made a spring. He caught me unawares, and almost tripped me up. "I shall arrest you," he said, "for stealing the meat of this lady."

"Let go," I answered; "I have not stolen it. She has my sovereign, and this is paid for." I shook him off, but I saw he meant to attack me again. I do not know what possessed me, but I seized the frying-pan, and, with the still spluttering fat in it, I brought it down with a crash on his head. He fell like a log, and, armed with my curious weapon, I made a dash into the crowd. I heard two or three yells of pain as the hot metal came in contact with the hands and faces of my assailants, but the odds were too many; and after a desperate resistance, I was at last overpowered, and with my clothes almost torn off my back, and half stunned, felt myself borne through the open air. A door was opened; I was thrown in, then it was quickly locked behind me, and I was alone.

CHAPTER XVI

A TRANSVAAL COURT OF JUSTICE

IT took me some little time to recover my senses completely. When I did, as far as the darkness would permit, I made out that I was in a strongly-built room of about fifteen feet square. A heavily barred window fronted the door; the walls were damp and clammy to the touch; the ground, which appeared to be in a filthy state, was nothing more than a mud floor. At the far end there was some straw, but beyond this there seemed to be nothing in the apartment. There were one or two iron rings set into the wall, and by the aid of one of these I managed to climb up and peer out, for the window boasted no glass. However, in spite of my damp garments, or I should rather say what remained of them, the want of glass was not felt, for the night was warm.

Every now and then I caught snatches of song or a boisterous shout of laughter, and I knew the carouse of the Hollanders was being kept up. The floor was so damp and dirty that I made up my mind to walk about all night; but exhausted nature claims its due, and, try how I would, I could not keep awake, so sat down with

my back to the door, it being drier to lean against than the wall of the chamber.

I had fallen into a restless sleep, when I was roused from it by a thundering kick at the door. It was only a kind of "good-night" the drunken officials were giving me before retiring to their beds to sleep off their night's debauch, for they stumbled away swearing—now that the strong door lay between us—of what they would do to the English in general and myself in particular. They were full of Dutch courage, and went off singing about Majuba, and a miscellaneous collection of their own national songs, which no doubt are very inspiriting, but hardly to be appreciated when sung or rather howled in half-a-dozen keys, or no key at all.

At last all was still and quiet, and I nodded off again. Something warm woke me, and on opening my eyes I found that it was broad daylight, and the generous rays of the sun were shining full upon me. It quite cheered me. I yawned, got up, stretched myself, and felt that after all I had not had such a bad night's rest. One gets inured to hardship, and I had a roof over my head which kept off the heavy dew. Thinking of roofs, I looked up at mine. It was some height from the ground, probably twelve feet, but was only thatched; the bare rafters ran across the building, and at the end, near the window, I fancied I could catch a glimpse of the blue sky beyond. My scrutiny was brought to a close by hearing someone outside. The door opened, and a black policeman presented himself. He carried a bowl of hot mealie meal porridge, with a wooden spoon stuck into it. Placing it down on the floor,

without a word he retired, and the door closed behind him.

Mealie poop, as it is called, is not a luxury, but I had often eaten it before; so, without any more ado, I set to with my wooden spoon, and soon made a good hole in the contents of the bowl. All I wanted now was a wash, and thinking of that made me think of my appearance. No farmer in England could have prided himself on possessing a better scarecrow; the remnant of the light linen coat I wore now only possessed the sleeves and a small piece of the back; a large rent was down one side of my trousers, whilst my shirt was literally in rags. I still had my belt containing the ready money I had with me, and the two letters I had written to Hallimond. Strange to say, my revolver was also in my back pocket; it could not have been noticed, or I should not have had it now. My taking the frying-pan as a weapon must have convinced them that I was not carrying a six-shooter, or they would not have been so bold in giving their final kicks at the door before retiring for the night.

I looked about everywhere; how should I conceal it with the rest of my possessions? If I was let off, or only given a small fine, it would be an easy matter to get my goods back; but if, on the other hand, I was again to be confined in this cell, I was sure to be searched first, and if so, there would be little chance of ever having any of my belongings returned to me; for, without exception, the Transvaal police are the most corrupt in the world.

An idea struck me. From the position I had taken

when I peered through the window, I might with a spring reach a cross-beam—if it did not bear me, all the worse for the beam and myself; still, it was worth trying. I took the letters and loose money out of my belt, as the latter might have been noticed the night before, and it would not do to conceal it. Selecting ten pounds, I slipped them into my boots, then tying the rest up with my revolver in the sleeve of my coat, I mounted on to the ring, and made the leap. The rafter bent, and I thought it would give way. However it held, and quickly sliding along it, I safely deposited my package on the top of the wall just above the eaves, and in such a position that, owing to the height of the wall from the ground, it was quite impossible to see it.

Shortly afterwards two black policemen appeared at the door, and placing themselves on each side of me, I was marched out into the open air, followed by a grinning mob of Boers, Kafirs, women, and children. I was conducted to a long shed, which, I discovered, had been placed at the disposal of the acting Landrost.

Judging from the pile of boxes that stood at the far end, the building was nothing more or less than a store-house. Some dozen or so of beer cases had been put in three lines, crossed by loose deals, and on this rudely improvised platform a table and chair had been placed; and in the chair, still wearing his white cotton suit, sat the black-bearded man I had seen the night before in the company of the person with the police or military get-up. He was writing very hard when I came in, nor did he look up. Below him at a small table sat one of the Hollanders, his nose decorated by a

piece of sticking-plaster. He was evidently the Clerk of the Court, and the man above him, the Landrost.

At the right of the judge, just below the platform, sat my hostess, arrayed in all the glory of a blue silk dress with a yellow sash, and resplendent in an innumerable number of rings which she had put on over her gloves, not to mention a few yards of gold chain, a pair of massive gold ear-rings, and gold brooches thrown in here and there wherever space could be found. She had not considered it necessary to put on a hat, but made up for the loss by a wonderful comb and a few other odds and ends stuck in her hair. It was plain she was got up to kill, and the Queen of Sheba, in her opinion, would have been but a poor competitor. Three or four men were seated near her, and behind her chair, with a very black eye, and a strip of sticking plaster down the left side of his face, stood my chief assailant of the night before, still wearing the uniform, and casting angry glances in my direction. The rest of the company were standing, and consisted of a motley group who had followed me to the building.

I was placed on the left hand of the Landrost, and a native policeman stood on either side of me. His worship kept on writing as if he had all the business of the world before him, and was not in the least aware of the presence of a single soul near him. Presently he bent over and whispered to the man at the little table below him. The latter, in Dutch, and in a loud voice, proclaimed that the Court was opened. For a few seconds there was silence, then the clerk arose and called three times.

"George Leigh! George Leigh! George Leigh!"

This proved to me conclusively that there was a plot, or how would they have known my name? However, I answered in just as loud a voice as he had spoken in, "Here."

He then read a long rigmarole in Dutch, that on the night before (mentioning the date), I had feloniously entered the kitchen of Johanna Maria Van der Merwe, and forcibly possessed myself of two pounds of meat and a loaf of bread, and that, when called upon by Police Lieutenant Grobelaar to deliver up the property, I had assaulted that officer with a frying-pan, causing him grievous bodily harm; that I had also assaulted Claim Inspector Carl van Leenhoff, Johannes Jacobus Kruger, of the Surveyor-General's Office, Pretoria, and others, and that, besides this, I had forcibly entered the stable of the said Johanna Maria Van der Merwe, and had provided my horse with forage, which horse, the said Johanna Maria Van der Merwe had sworn on oath was the property of her husband, Hans Van der Merwe, who was now away, and must have been stolen from him. Then turning to me he said: "Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

I did not take the least notice of his question, but stood and looked at them all. The Landrost leaned over and whispered something to him. The clerk made a very wry face, then, as if to express his contempt for the language, spat on the floor, and addressed me in English by saying: "Are you guilty to zee sharges or are you not?"

"What charges?" I replied.

"Zee sharges I am joss made," he answered.

It was evident from his speech that he was not an Africander, but a Hollander. I determined therefore to get as much fun as I could out of him, so I answered by saying: "What charges have you just made?"

I heard him swearing under his breath about the stupid Englishman, but I was not going to give them the least idea that I understood Dutch.

"You name George Leigh?" he said.

"How did you know that?" I answered.

He remained silent for a few seconds, then turned to the Landrost; but the latter only made a sign for him to go on.

"You have the vleis (meat) van zee winkel last night steal," he said.

I looked at him in blank astonishment for a moment, then replied: "What do you say about winkles? I have never seen a winkle in this country, much less stolen one."

He looked puzzled, then said: "Vleis—vleis—vleis!"

"What do you mean?—do you mean fish?" and I took great pains to speak very rapidly each time I answered. Again I heard him swearing under his breath. A grin was beginning to spread over the faces of his companions, for I have since learned that he had always boasted of his knowledge of the English language. The man's face grew very red; it was plain to me that my interlocutor was getting angry. Again he turned to the Landrost, but the latter, as before, only signed for him to go on.

He seized the charge in his hand, and in a wonderful

jargon of Dutch, Cape Dutch, and a smattering of English, gabbled it over.

It was too much for the gravity of the spectators. A broad grin spread over their faces, then a titter, and finally a shout of laughter. My accusers, witnesses, spectators, and even the Landrôst, were all taken with the fit, all except the Clerk of the Court, who, almost beside himself with rage, was alternately shaking his fist at my opponents and at me.

The Landrost at last stood up and waved his arms above his head, which was supposed to imply silence. It was some time, however, before he accomplished his wish, for loud titters kept continually bursting out. When there was a lull, his worship in a loud voice proclaimed that if there was another sound he would commit the offender for contempt of Court; then turning to me, he said in perfect English:

"George Leigh, you are accused by Johanna Maria Van der Merwe with entering her kitchen by force last night, and feloniously abstracting therefrom two pounds of meat and a loaf of bread; you are further accused of savagely assaulting," etc., etc., and he went all through the charge again, including the feeding of my horse, and finally wound up by asking, "Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" I said in a loud voice.

The idiot of a Hollander who had read the charge in Dutch against me now called upon Johanna Maria Van der Merwe to give her evidence, and jingling and rustling she stood up to obey the summons.

It would be a waste of time to go over her evidence,

except that she exaggerated a great deal more than the charge had set forth, and with a flood of tears asked the Landrost and the audience "if this was the way a poor woman was to be treated during the absence of her husband, with no one to protect her?" As she spoke in Cape Dutch, and was probably under the impression that I did not understand it, she was able to give more emphasis to her words, and appeal more to the feelings of her hearers. When she sat down a murmur ran round the Court, and I caught the words of "skellum," "rooi nek," and a few other choice expressions about the Englishman. Seeing that she had caused a sensation, her tears stopped almost as quickly as they had come, and a smile of malicious satisfaction spread over her face; she put away her handkerchief, and looked at the Landrost. The latter turned to me, and said:

"You have heard the accusation; what have you to say in defence of yourself?"

"The accusation," I replied, "was in Cape Dutch, and it is pretty evident to me that it will benefit me little whatever I say; but this I will say, that the whole affair is a trumped-up case, and you are as well aware as she is that it is utterly false."

"Ah!" he said, scowling at me, "you dare to address me in my capacity of Landrost in that way?"

"Yes, I dare," I replied, "and what is more, I will tell you this: that unless this matter takes a very different turn to what you intend it to do, you will before long find yourself in a far worse predicament than I am in at the present moment."

"We shall see, we shall see," was his answer, turning white with passion; then leaning towards his clerk and addressing him in Cape Dutch, which I could see the latter barely understood, so great is the difference between the language of Holland and that spoken in South Africa, he told him to enter the charge as guilty, which he immediately did in a book before him with the utmost alacrity. Then turning to me, his worship addressed me, first in Cape Dutch for the benefit of the audience, then in English, thinking I did not understand the language.

"I find you guilty of the charges this poor woman has brought against you; first, of the theft of her husband's horse; then, that in a cowardly way you entered her kitchen, stole her hard-earned food"—here the Queen of Sheba looked as if the toil of millions rested on her shoulders, and gave a deep sigh—"and not content with this, you assaulted her friends; all this, whilst her hard-working husband was away. It is disgraceful, and your punishment must be heavy; but as the givers of the law in our noble land are always inclined to mercy"—here there was a murmur of approval—"and, as I would not pass sentence on you until I have well considered your case, you will for the time being be taken back to your prison."

Snatching a piece of paper off the table, before the astonished Clerk of the Court could realise what I was doing, I hastily scribbled on it two words, and throwing it on the Landrost's table I turned towards the door; and as I went down the building escorted by my two former guards, I called out—"Whilst you are considering

my sentence you may at the same time think over the words I have written, and the consequences to yourself."

When I got near the door I looked over my shoulder. He was holding the paper in his hand, and I could see that his face was very white.

CHAPTER XVII

IN PRISON

I LEFT the building, and, escorted by my guards, proceeded on my return journey to the gaol. I saw another party of men advancing from the further end of the village; as they got nearer I could make out that they were hustling a native along at a great rate, and his destination appeared to be the very place I had just left. A rope had been placed round his neck so as to form what sailors call a clove hitch; the ends of the rope were held by two Boers who walked on either side of him. The man looked half-strangled, but still they dragged him on. His arms were secured behind his back, and half staggering, half rolling, the movements of the poor wretch were impelled by three or four other men who walked behind him, and every now and then I saw that one or the other would raise his sjambok and bring it down with a thud on the back or shoulders of their prisoner. We had arrived almost to within ten yards of them; the captive raised his eyes and looked at me. "Inkoss! Inkoss!" he gasped. Our eyes met —it was Basket, my driver!

Forgetting for the moment that I, too, was a prisoner, I sprang from between my guards and rushed at the

nearest Boer, in whom I had recognised the man I had spoken to at the waggon the day before, but before I could reach him my two native guards had sprung upon me. My prison door was only within a few feet of where we were; I was dragged towards it, it was opened, I was thrust in, and as I fell on my face on the floor, I heard it closed and locked behind me.

For a second or two I lay half-dazed, then springing up I ran to the barred window, and was just in time to witness the party enter the Court House. I remained there some ten minutes, when they reappeared, and I could see that they were coming in my direction.

I speculated as to whether they would confine him in the same place as myself. I jumped down from my perch and waited. They stood outside my door, then I heard a voice say: "No, the other room." A door opened, then it banged, and I knew that there was only the thickness of the wall between master and man.

I again returned to my look-out, and soon saw the Landrost appearing; he was followed by the woman, the police lieutenant bringing up the rear. I saw them cross the road and walk in the direction of Van der Merwe's store.

About an hour later, I heard a key grate in the lock, and my two guards again presented themselves. One of them advanced towards me in a very humble way. He carried a rough wooden tray in his arms, covered by a towel; removing it, a really tempting meal lay before me—three large chops, a quantity of potatoes, a loaf of

Boer bread, and a bottle of English beer. There was actually a tumbler to drink it out of, and a knife and fork. I could see the man himself was surprised at the display. His companion placed a bundle he was carrying on the floor near the door, then picking up the now cold mealie poop, all of which I had not eaten in the morning, they closed my door, and immediately after I heard them open the next one. One of them shouted out in Kafir, "this is good enough for a dog," and I suppose he threw Basket the remainder of my breakfast, for the door was then closed, and they walked away.

I smiled as I looked at the meal. Could it be poisoned? Should I eat it? Why not, I had paid for it; and without any more ado I sat down, and in a very short space of time, except for the Boer loaf, there was very little left. I now picked up the bundle —a grey flannel shirt, a pair of moleskin trousers, a smasher hat, and a pair of veldt schoen (flat shoes made by the Boers), were its contents. I certainly wanted a change of clothing, so I put them on. As I dived into the trouser pockets, my fingers felt a small piece of paper. In a back hand, for the purpose of disguising it, the following words were scribbled in English—

"Your door will not be locked to-night."

Could there be any one in the whole of that village who wished me well, except the poor black wretch who lay in the next cell? I was certain there was not. Then why this change of front, and why had the note been sent? Supposing I tried to escape in the manner suggested, might it not be a plan on the part

of my enemies to make more sure of me? A criminal trying to escape is liable to be shot whilst doing so; how was I to know that this was not the intention? Then again, when once outside, where was I to go to? I had no horse, and it was madness to think of going on foot, unarmed as I was, in that wild and savage country. That some plot was brewing against my interests I was certain, but for the moment I could not unravel it; so I lay down on my old rags and waited for the next move.

Meanwhile, I had better make sure of my money and the revolver. I soon got on the beam and rescued my parcel, when on chancing to look at the wall that separated me from the cell Basket was in, I noticed for the first time that the top of the wall in many places did not quite reach the thatch, but that the space had been simply patched with loose stones. I wondered if by getting on the end beam I could manage to remove a few of them and get a glimpse of the next cell? I soon put the idea to the test, and found that I could.

Very, very carefully I removed the loose stones, shoving them up further on to the wall so as not to arouse suspicion, should any of them be seen on my floor. One was bigger than the others, and from the awkward position in which I was placed I found it very difficult to get hold of. At last I thought I had it, when I felt it slipping, and with a heavy thud it fell into the next cell, and at the same time I heard Basket's ejaculation of astonishment.

"Keep silence, Basket," I called softly over the wall.

"Inkoss, Inkoss," he replied in a hoarse whisper, and I knew that he had recognised my voice.

"Can you get up where the stone has fallen from?"

"Inkoss, I can."

"Then do so," I said, and in a few seconds later I could just make out his woolly head as it appeared on the level of the top of the wall.

"Ah, Basket," I said, "had you not left me you would not be where you are now."

"I did not want to leave the Inkoss," he replied. "The mulungu was good to Basket, and he does not forget it. It is the Boer men who took me away from him, and who let loose the oxen; they dragged me across the veldt, and told me if I called to the Inkoss, I should surely die by the sjambok. Basket is no coward, but the sjambok is heavy, Inkoss, and cut into the flesh of Basket; and then they made me drive their waggon. Twice I ran from them, but they came after me, and twice I was tied to the waggon wheel, and the sjambok cut my back and shoulders; but when I saw the mulungu, I wanted to come to him, and would have done so, but the Baas Hans said he would surely shoot me, so I stayed until we were two hours from the village, and when they came to the outspan again I ran away, for I knew the Inkoss had gone to the Woodbush village, and that when he saw his Basket he would look after him and take him from the Boer men; but one of them followed on the pony the Bushman had ridden, and caught me near the village—then the Inkoss saw me. They took me to the Inkoss makulu (Landrost), and when the sun has again risen, the sjambok has to play

fifty times on the back of Basket. And now Basket has spoken, and the Inkoss knows all."

And this was the man I thought had deserted me, stolen my oxen, and murdered my voorlooper, January! It does not do to show any emotion before a native, so I simply said:

"Basket, the sjambok shall not play on you to-morrow. I have spoken."

Though for the moment I had not the least idea how I was going to get him out of the scrape, yet so great was the belief of this simple savage in what his master could do, that he exhausted the whole of the Zulu vocabulary in expressions of gratitude, calling me "his great father." It never in the least seemed to occur to him that I was in almost a similar plight to himself.

"Now, Basket," I said, "keep quiet, do not speak, and to-night, or on the morrow, we must go; but I tell you again, the sjambok shall not play with you. I have spoken."

"The ears of Basket are large, and they hear the Inkoss speak; they are the words of the Tagati." I heard him drop to the ground, and followed his example.

The long shadows through the grated bars of my window warned me that ere long the sun would sink to rest. It grew dusk, and was almost immediately dark, for the moon had not yet risen. The key grated in the lock, and again my two guards appeared. As before, they bore a tray, deposited it on the ground, and withdrew to the door. I heard them insert the key in the lock. Could they have locked it? I went quietly up to

the door, and tried it softly; it was open, and the key had been left on the outside. I drew it in, and instantly locked the door on the inside. Then I clambered up to my beam. "Now is the time," I thought; "they will not think of watching the place so soon after visiting me, whatever their intentions may be."

I mounted the beam, and in less than a quarter of an hour, aided by Basket on the other side, I had made a hole large enough to admit the body of a man. With a good deal of wriggling he at last managed to get through, and was soon safely landed on the floor of my cell.

I pressed some of the provisions into his hand, and told him to eat. He did not want to take it, but I commanded him to. What remained I made up in a small parcel, and then mounting once more to the beam, I reached the spot where I had seen daylight through the thatch. Very, very cautiously we broke it away, bit by bit; at last I could manage to get my head out. I listened. There was not a sound, but lights were shining through some of the windows. I was about to withdraw my head to warn Basket to be ready, when I heard a soft footstep almost below me,—a man came creeping under the wall, and, in spite of the darkness, I could see that he was carrying a gun. He stood still almost beneath me, and seemed to be listening, then crept stealthily round the corner.

I soon made up my mind on the best course to pursue. Basket was well acquainted with the country round; my only plan was to let him depart alone. For myself, I thought it better to face the matter out. I had a trump

card up my sleeve, and there was one in the village who knew it. I told Basket that he would have to go alone. At first he would not hear of it, saying he wanted to "remain with the Inkoss," but when I insisted, and explained my plan, he gave in with a bad grace. I put a couple of sovereigns in his hand, gave him the rest of the provisions and my old clothes, and also one of the letters I had written to Hallimond, instructing him that he was to make his way to Pietersburg, and from thence by the coach road to Makapans-poort, and on to Pretoria. From there he was to go to Middelburg, straight to the Hotel, and ask the Baas where my friend, the white man who finds the black stone (coal), was? He, Basket, was not to rest until he had found him, was to deliver him the letter, and obey him as his master until he saw me again.

"Now, Basket," I said, "do you understand?"

"Inkoss, my ears are open, and it shall be done as you say," was his reply.

Then climbing once more up to the roof, I again took a survey. The moment seemed propitious.

"Now, Basket, quick," I said.

In a moment he had passed through the thatched roof. I thrust my head out and watched him drop lightly to the ground, then there was a shot, and then another—I saw the flash of the rifle not fifty paces off—but he did not fall, and I heard him rushing away through the darkness in the direction of a dense wood about a quarter of a mile on the left.

I had seldom known a fleeter runner than Basket, and I felt pretty sure that in another few minutes he would be safe. Several more shots were fired, I heard

footsteps pursuing him, and then all was quiet. At last I heard them returning. They came nearer.

"I did not think the Englishman could run like that," said a voice I seemed to recognise.

"No," replied another, "but the Kafir police may catch him yet, and when they have, they will know what to do."

"He was cunning in not going out through the door," said the first speaker; "but let us go and see if he has left anything behind."

They walked round to my door and tried to open it.

"Why, I told them to leave the key on the outside of the door," said the first speaker, "but it is locked. Well, we will get out that Kafir devil, and hear what he can tell us about his late master; I will promise him a hundred cuts to-morrow instead of fifty, if he does not speak out," and he laughed. After trying the next door to mine, they called out, but no one answered.

"Come to the door, you black devil!" one of them said; but again there was no answer.

"Are you sure that only one of them got away?" asked his companion.

"Yes, I am certain. I am sure it was the Englishman, for as he ran past I could see that he had clothes on."

"Why did you not seize him?"

"You know why," was the answer.

"Well, I suppose this Kafir devil is sulky," the other remarked, "but we will cure him of that in the morning;" and I heard them walk away.

There was nothing more to be done, so I sat down with my back against the door and made myself as comfortable as I could under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PLOT THICKENS

THE early morning light was stealing into my cell when I awoke. I had half a mind to turn the key and walk out, but after well considering the matter, I thought it better for the time to remain where I was. I knew, from what I had overheard the night before, that the few native police belonging to the station were in pursuit of me, and the longer they were unaware of my presence in the village, the better chance there was for the escape of Basket, and the delivery of my letter to Hallimond.

I lit my pipe—the faithful companion that has whiled away many weary hours for others in a worse plight than myself—and blessed my stars that up to the present I had managed to retain it. I climbed up to my window; no one appeared to be stirring. I turned the key, inserted it in the lock on the outside, and again closed my door. About an hour after this, I heard some signs of life, but no one seemed to trouble to come my way. My usual breakfast time came, but still no one appeared. At last I heard footsteps approaching. They went straight to the door

next to mine, the key turned in the lock, and it was thrown open. There was a momentary silence, then the Kafir ejaculation of surprise, "Ow!" and the word "hambili!" (gone).

Without taking the least notice of the key in my door, I heard them running up the village street, and on peeping out I saw two native policemen. About ten minutes later I again heard several footsteps returning; it was clear a crowd was approaching. I went to the corner of the cell furthest from the door, and sat down. A voice said in Cape Dutch:

"How is it you left the key in the door, you black scoundrel?" It was pushed open. There stood my friend the police lieutenant. He started back as if he had seen a ghost; then a grim smile of satisfaction spread over his face.

"Ah!" he said, "our Englishman is here yet," and immediately he spoke several other heads appeared at the door. "We shall see," he went on, looking from me to the hole in the roof, "whether our Transvaal prisons are to be broken through with impunity; by our law it is punishable with the 'cat,' and that is even worse than a hot frying-pan!" And with these words, and casting a savage glance at me, he left the cell. I heard him giving instructions that the door was to be securely locked, that a man was to be placed on guard outside, and, that if I escaped, it would go hard with him.

From the lieutenant's behaviour, it was quite evident to me that he had not been a party to my escape, and that if ever a man hated me, he did. I began to think

I might have done better, after all, by going off with Basket, but it was too late now.

In about an hour a man came and unlocked the door, and shoved in another of those wooden bowls containing mealie poop, then immediately relocked it again. It was clear that I was no longer to expect the good cheer of the day before. At last I heard several horsemen approaching. I climbed up to my window. Three or four mounted men passed almost beneath me, and in one I recognised the young giant they called Long Piet. I could make out they were riding towards Van der Merwe's store. The day wore on, but no one came near me. About five o'clock the door opened, and the police lieutenant appeared. Behind him stood Long Piet and a couple of other Boers.

"Good day, friend," said the young giant, after looking at me for a few seconds; "I am glad to be able to do you a service. On my way here I met Oom Hendrick de Villiers, who told me that he had just sold to an Englishman a horse that used to belong to Oom Hans Van der Merwe. Oom Hans' good vrou did not know her husband had sold it, and that is why she brought the charge against you, and sorry she is for the mistake. I know him," he said, addressing the lieutenant, "and the Heer Landrost told you, if I knew him, that you were to let him go."

"Ja, ja," replied the lieutenant, who did not appear to be at all satisfied; "but who is this Hendrick de Villiers?" and he took out a pocket-book to put down the answer.

Long Piet seemed disconcerted for a second, but there is no race who are greater adepts at lying than the Boers; so looking through his squinting eyes, he put on an air of surprise, and said: "What! you do not know Oom Hendrick de Villiers?—but then, you have not been long in these parts. Why, he is one of the best known men in the Bush veldt."

"Very good," said the officer; "as the Landrost said he was to go free if you knew him, there is nothing for me to do but to let him out. But, hark you," he continued, turning to me, "there is a score to be settled between us some day," and he left the door open, indicating that I was free to go when and where I pleased.

That the lieutenant was a conceited fool I could see, and it was not very difficult to tell that the others thought so too; but what in the name of goodness could be their object in getting me set at liberty? I knew there was some mischief brewing, but it would be better to be once more in the open air to combat mishap, than to be left to the petty tyranny and malice of the Pretoria policeman; so I pretended to be most grateful to my squinting giant, and we all walked out together.

As we proceeded towards the canteen, Long Piet told me that he had only arrived that day, and on his way up had met Oom Hendrick de Villiers, who had told him to inquire how his friend the Englishman was getting on, and to give him any help he might ask for, in case he found that Hans Van der Merwe was not in the Woodbush village, but had gone to Magato's, and at the last word he lowered his voice.

I asked him where he had met De Villiers? His reply

was that he was quite two days' journey from the village, and that he had passed him at Springbok Pan. This I knew must be a lie, as it was quite impossible for the Bushman to have returned in time for his master to have gone all that distance.

"He has travelled very fast," I said.

"Ja," he replied. "You see he has four good horses and a good cart, and Oom Hendrick is in a hurry to get to Middelburg, so he drives fast." I thought of the screws I had removed from the boss of the wheels, and felt certain that the man was telling me another lie, and that for some reason Hendrick de Villiers, *alias* Hans Van der Merwe, was still not far from where I had left him.

We entered the canteen. Immediately the woman saw me she came forward.

"Sir," she said, "I regret that through a mistake you have been placed in an awkward position. My friend Long Piet has explained how you came into possession of the horse that used to belong to my husband. I hope you will consider my house at your disposal for the remainder of your stay here. Our Landrost told me to give you his excuses."

"The Landrost!—but where is he?" I asked.

"He left for the Spelonken some hours ago. He received instructions to go at once."

"The Spelonken! But what could a magistrate of this district want in the Spelonken?"

"I am not in the Transvaal government service," said the woman with a laugh, "but all I know is, that he has certainly started for the Spelonken."

The plot was thickening. Here was I set at liberty, Mrs Van der Merwe the essence of politeness, the Landrost of the Woodbush village gone to the Spelonken; the very Boer who, only a short time ago I had seen deliberately dropping a suspicious powder in my coffee, posing as my bosom friend, and what was more, I was sure that Van der Merwe was still in the near vicinity. What could it all mean? That it portended no good I was certain; but how to avoid the evil? It was a knotty problem to solve, and the more I thought over the situation the more perplexing and bewildering it appeared.

At last I thought of a plan. I counted the time that Lucy had told me she still had before Du Toit, the Landrost of Middelburg, would claim her as his bride. There were another five weeks to run. Of course, if my letter reached Hallimond, and the girl had carried out my instructions about arranging a meeting with him immediately she arrived in Middelburg, then all might be well; but, on the other hand, supposing my letter which I had confided to Basket never reached him, and even supposing it did, and Lucy had not carried out my instructions, what would he have to go on? Absolutely nothing. What a fool I had been not to make the matter more clear! Just fancy writing to a man and telling him that if I did not return by a certain time, he was to carry off the person who had handed him my note on a piece of brown paper! Why, unless he received the note from Lucy, and heard her story, he would certainly think I was mad or suffering from an attack of malarial fever. No; the only thing to do was

to get back to Middelburg, and the only way I could hope to do that would be to induce the villains who were evidently bent on keeping me away, to imagine that they had thoroughly duped me; and that I was fully convinced Hans Van der Merwe was in Magato's stronghold, and to express my desire to proceed there at once. When with that powerful chief, I had little doubt I might influence him on my behalf. I had often heard of his good qualities, of how he respected Englishmen, and how, on the other hand, he hated and detested the Boers, who murdered his father. The very plan these Boer scoundrels had concocted would, after all, prove the best thing for me. That is how I argued, and I determined without loss of time to put their plan into execution.

My three Boer companions, who had stuck to me like leeches, were sitting drinking at a small table, so turning to Long Piet, I said: "It appears to me, friend, that if I want to see Hans Van der Merwe I shall have to make the journey you spoke about?"

"Ja, friend," he answered, "that is certain."

"But how long will it take from here? for I am in a hurry, and have no time to waste."

"That is right; I see that all Englishmen are not lazy. You speak well; when do you want to start?"

"To-night, if possible."

"No, no, not to-night; that cannot be. Jan van Niekerk is giving a dance, and he has asked us all there; you must come too. You will be the first Englishman that has ever danced at Oom Jan's; but he will be glad to see you if you are a friend of mine.

What do you say?" he continued, addressing the others; "must not the Englishman come with us?"

"Ja, ja, certainly," they replied in the same breath.

"I do not want to dance," I said, but it was of no avail my refusing; so at last I consented, and, as it was already sundown, I asked if I might have a room where I could wash and sleep that night. The landlady, now all smiles, at once told the Kafir boy to show the English Groote Baas to the bedroom, and preceded by the functionary from whom, only two nights before, I had annexed the frying chops, I was led to a little out-building of galvanized iron. A door was pushed open, revealing a room about ten feet long and six broad, containing a camp bedstead, an old broken jug, and tin basin, and one solitary chair. The boy lit a rushlight candle and then left me.

Now that the man had gone I took a closer scrutiny of my apartment. Mine was the centre room of three similar ones, the partition between them being only of thin boards covered by a cheap, gaudy paper. In many parts it had been either torn or worn off, revealing the bare boards and open chinks between them.

I revelled in a good wash, and as I thought it a befitting occasion to invest in a coat, for I no longer possessed one, I opened the door hurriedly with the intention of going to the store and buying one, but in so doing, I almost fell over a man who had undoubtedly been spying on me through the keyhole. He was gone like a flash, but not before I had recognised the Bush-man whom Van der Merwe had sent with me to the Woodbush village. I no longer had any doubts but that his master must be near at hand.

. I purchased my coat, put it on, and as the men said there would still be a little time before we started for the dance, retired from the store as if I was going to my room ; but on regaining the open air, I directed my steps towards the stable, which, as I have already stated, was at a short distance from the main building.

The woman had acknowledged that the horse was mine, so why should I not go and see it? As I entered the door I saw at a glance that the stable was full, and that my horse was right at the far end. The place was very badly lighted, so I took down the lantern and went towards him. I noticed that he had no food in the manger, so I went to a sort of partition where I knew the forage was stored. I had dragged down three or four bundles preparatory to cutting them up—as in the Transvaal the oats are left on the stalk, put up in bundles, and cut when required—when, through the hole in the wall which constituted the window, I heard the voice of Long Piet mentioning my name. From where I was the light could not show into the stable. In a trice I had blown it out, and creeping well to the back of the forage, remained perfectly still. Almost at the same moment Long Piet and his two friends entered the stable.

"I saw they had a good feed about an hour ago," said one of the men.

"But you did not give old Blessbok any?" asked Long Piet.

"Is it likely?" replied the man; "for all I know, he has had nothing for the last twenty-four hours."

"How is that?" asked another voice.

"Why!" said the first speaker with a laugh, "don't you know old Blessbok? Tell him, Piet."

"It would serve you right if we sold him to you," said that worthy; "if the Englishman was not here, I surely would."

"But," remarked the questioner, "I have always known old Blessbok to be one of the best of horses."

"So he is," said Long Piet, "but you should see what he looks like after a forty-eight hours' starve. Why, if ever a horse looked as if he had the horse-sickness it is old Blessbok! Last year an Englishman, I think he was an officer from the garrison at Pietermaritzburg, came up for some shooting in the Klein Letaba. We sold old Blessbok to him for seventy pounds, and, two days before he had to go, for his leave was up, I took good care that no forage came the way of Blessbok. He used to come and see it served out to him, but the idiot never stood by and saw him eat it—he was too fond of his own stomach. I told him I would see him fed, for there were three other horses with us, but when the Rooi Nek had gone, you can be sure the horse did not get much. I shall never forget the day he said he would have to start. Blessbok looked as near dead as ever I had seen a horse—I had given him a drench the night before.

"The Rooi Nek asked me to look after him, and gave me five pounds, and told me to let him know how he got on. Hans Van der Merwe wrote a line the next day, saying the horse was dead; and in a month after we got another five pounds from the fool, saying he hoped to come up again, and have some more sport.

In two days' time old Blessbok was as fresh as ever."

"But this Englishman is not such a fool!" said the questioner. "I saw that by the way he rode the horse when he came towards the waggon."

"Leave that to me," said Long Piet; "he is in a hurry, and wants to get to Magato's. Blessbok will again have the horse-sickness before to-morrow night, and I will sell him my Rinkals. He has plenty of money, and I will take his paper, and in less than a week's time Rinkals will be back, for I have arranged that the Bushman shall steal him." There was a roar of laughter at these words, and one of them admiringly remarked:

"You ought to be called 'Slim' (sly) Piet, instead of 'Long' Piet," and the three of them left the stable.

Long Piet's calculations were, had he known it, very soon upset, for in less than ten minutes I had cut old Blessbok such a supper, that I doubt whether he had ever had such a big one before. The poor beast whinnied with pleasure, and ate as if he were half-starved. I stood by him and spoke to him for a few moments, and felt that I had made another friend in that friendless land.

Creeping quietly out of the stable, and re-entering my room, I threw myself on my bed. I had not been there five minutes when I heard footsteps approaching.

"Now, Englishman," said Piet's coarse voice.

"What is the matter?" I answered in a drowsy tone.

"The matter!" said the man; "why, we have been looking for you everywhere, and here you are, sleeping

like a veldt rat. The dance will have begun long ago, and we shall be late, so come, make haste."

"All right, I am coming, but I want to give my horse a feed first."

"You need not do that," he answered; "I have just given him enough to keep him busy all night."

"Still, I should like to see him."

"Then we shall be late," he said in a sulky voice. "Here, Andries!" he called to one of the men who had been standing at a little distance, "what sort of a feed did I give that horse?"

"Feed!" replied the man, "do you call it a feed? I have never seen one like it before—no, in God's name, I have not."

"Come on, then," I said, and allowing them to think that they had entirely bamboozled me, we started for the dance.

CHAPTER XIX

A TEMPLE OF TERPSICHORE

WE walked quickly down the straggling street, and ere long the squeaking of a wheezy concertina and the shuffling of many feet told us the night's festivities had already begun.

"Come, friend," said Long Piet, as he executed an elephantine kind of double-shuffle, "let us hurry; I am eager to be there, and Kato Klein is waiting for me. She is a fine girl, Englishman, a very fine girl;" and he began humming "Die vaal haarer," a favourite song amongst the Boers, the words being specially adapted to their weight of brain and their general tone of conversation. The main purport of the words being, that a young damsel, blessed with an extraordinary amount of fair hair, blue eyes, and pearly teeth, informs her faithful swain that, as long as he lives on the "high veldt" and rides a brown horse, he can always pay his addresses to her; but should he take it into his head to sell the beast, then, for her part, he can go back to his mother. The song ran somewhat as follows:—

"Should Jan come riding o'er the veldt,
With his brown horse, on pleasure bent,
With him I will the time beguile,
And court his love, his look, his smile;
But should he with the brown horse part,
Then Jan has lost this loving heart.

"I know his sheep, his oxen, well,
I know the tinkle of their bell,
His team of horses, young and smart,
His waggon, too, and new Scotch cart;
But should he with these things once part,
Then Jan has lost a loving heart.

"So let him plait his horse's tail,
And smooth his coat, and curl his mane,
And bring a candle long and thick,
In which the pin I will not stick;
But reap he not more than he sow,
Then Jan may to his mother go."

The idea of the pin being stuck in the candle signifies a custom by which the lady shows her appreciation of her admirer, her high opinion and show of favour being regulated by the length of candle she allows.

It was to the inspiriting strains of this amorous ditty we entered the dancing-room.

No doubt, to the uninitiated, visions of dazzling lights, tall mirrors, superb floral decorations, made from the thousands of arum lilies that grow wild in this country, adorn the room; whilst flashing gems, only equalled by the sparkling eyes of their fair wearers, are seen on every side, and a soft perfume pervades the atmosphere, sweet as the spicy breath of some distant Pacific island, or the fragrance of the conservatory of a millionaire. But dispel all these ideas. That there was a smell there was no denying, but it was not otto of roses, nor the conjured-up imaginary odours one is always inclined to believe pervade the atmosphere of a South Pacific island!

What really presented itself was this. In a room about fifteen feet long by twelve broad, some thirty to forty men and women were packed as tight as sardines in a tin. The illuminations consisted of some half-a-dozen candles made from sheep-tail fat, and stuck at intervals round the wall, the drippings falling on the heads of those who happened to be standing under them. Except for these illuminations, the walls were perfectly bare, though a rude attempt had been made at whitewashing them. The floor being of mud, and the room intensely hot, the faces of the dancers were already black from the clouds of dust that arose. In a corner at the far end of the room, and on a chair which had been placed on the top of a small table, sat the donor of the festivity, and on the floor, seated on a small stool, I occasionally caught a glimpse of the musician, who, with his hat on, and a pipe in his mouth, kept time with his head to the jerks and squeaks of the old concertina. Now and then he gave fresh zest to the dancers by roaring out, as loudly as the pipe would allow him to do, the words of their favourite song, whilst they, as they bobbed, jumped, jostled, and tumbled, took up the chorus.

Long Piet was in great feather, and immediately on entering plunged into the crowd, and was soon whirling round a female nearly as tall as himself, who might have rivalled in size the "fat lady" of a penny show.

Squeak, squeak—puff, puff, went the old concertina, as it laboured away under the sinewy arms and fingers of the musician, and each puff seemed as if the worn-out instrument were gasping for breath. The old man

perched upon the chair kept beating time with his feet, snapping his fingers above his head, and shouting words of encouragement to the revellers.

"Dance on, children, dance on!" he kept shouting; "my old legs feel as if they would like to join you."

They needed no encouragement; round and round they went. Some of the men, to give better play to their limbs had removed their corduroy jackets, and further embellished the apartment by hanging them over the rafters. It would be difficult indeed to describe what the whole scene looked like; it can better be imagined when I state that my reach-me-down suit was certainly by far the best in the room.

The excitement was at its height, the din was deafening, and the dust almost choking, when I saw our host rise to his feet and gesticulate in my direction. I was standing near the door, and turning round I saw the police lieutenant in all the glory of a new uniform, with none other than my Queen of Sheba leaning on his arm. Her magnificence of the Landrost's Court would have quite paled before the extraordinary get-up she now wore. Over a yellow muslin skirt she wore a violet low-cut bodice, trimmed with sea-green lace, and profusely decorated with sky-blue bows. Her arms were covered with massive gold bracelets, and a good many yards of chain of the same precious metal had been twisted in and out of her hair. On her hands she wore a pair of pink cotton gloves, over which were displayed innumerable rings, and to bring things to a finish she wore a pair of red, high-heeled shoes.

"Room, children! room for the lieutenant and Vrou Van der Merwe!" yelled the old man. For a few seconds

not the least notice was taken of his shouts, either by the dancers or the musician, but when the latter's hat had been finally kicked off by the host, who was now waxing wroth, and the music suddenly came to a standstill, the perspiring, gasping, capering crowd realised that something was the matter, and ceased their whirling.

"Shame on you! shame on you!" roared the old man. "Can't you see that the Heer Lieutenant and Vrou Van der Merwe want to dance?" So to make space for these august personages, the greater part of the company immediately left the room and retired outside the house.

The Queen of Sheba now came in, escorted by the police lieutenant, who scowled as he saw me, and with his fair partner advanced to the end of the room, made a bow after the most approved Pretoria style, and then shook hands with the host.

"Play up! play up!" said the latter to the musician, "the lieutenant and Vrou Van der Merwe are going to show us how they dance in Pretoria. Look! children, look!" he shouted to the rest of his guests; "look! I say, if you want to know how to dance!"

The man with the concertina struck up a tune something between a barn dance, jig, and polka, and the lieutenant, taking hold of his partner, whisked and bobbed, and scraped in a most wonderful manner.

It was whilst one of these extra bobs was going on that the Queen of Sheba suddenly twisted her ankle and fell to the floor, the policeman falling over her. It was too much for me. I could not restrain my laughter, and rushed from the room. I knew the lieutenant had heard me, but I cared little, for if ever there was a supercilious

snob, this man was one. Boiling with rage, he jumped to his feet, and had every appearance of making after me, but his late partner gasped out: "Water! water! bring me water!" Almost before she had uttered her request a native darted into the room with a cup of the required drink. As he handed it to the lieutenant, one small drop fell on the dress of the prostrate woman. In spite of the pain she must have been suffering she gave a shriek of rage. In a second the protector of the peace had sprung upon the man. He kicked him, hit him, bumped his head against the wall, and jumped on him; then, calling for a sjambok, which was speedily handed to him, he flogged the native until from sheer exhaustion he could do so no longer; but as he threw the terrible whip from him, gasped out for some strong man to take his place, and go on with the beating. It was too much for me. I sprang into the room, drew my revolver, and stood over the already half-killed man.

"Stand back!" I shouted; "if another raises his hand against this man I will not be answerable for his life." I picked up the victim of this outrage, and as he turned his face I saw it was none other than Kechima.

"Go out quickly," I said; and taking him by the arm, half staggering, half crawling, he made for the open door, through which peered a crowd of grinning, mocking faces. As Kechima's head protruded through the doorway, I saw a sjambok raised in the air above him; but before it could descend I thrust my revolver barrel bang into the teeth of the would-be assailant, and, spluttering and cursing, he fell back behind the others.

A sort of half-suppressed, sullen howl went up as we

walked away; then I heard the old man roaring from the room: "Come, fellows! do not let us spoil the dance for that black devil and the English pig. Come, play up! play up, and let us be merry!"

Squeak went the old concertina; those outside trooped in, all except one man, and he came running after us. I turned with my revolver in my hand to face him—it was Long Piet.

"It is all right, friend," he said. "I say it is all right; you did well," and then he ran back. I knew the scoundrel was particularly anxious to conciliate me, and felt certain that if questioned by the others as to why he ran after me he would be sure to tell them it was but to cast some insult at the English pig!

"Now, Kechima," I said, as we hurried on, "how did you get here?"

"Kechima ran from the drift on the Groote Olifants river," he replied.

"What! from the drift? But that is one hundred and fifty miles!"

"The distance is far," said the man, "but it is from thence I came—but five suns have risen since I started. I brought letters from the Heer Landrost of Middelburg to the groote Baas Hans Van der Merwe."

"But Hans Van der Merwe is not here?"

"Surely he is, Inkoss; he is with the Landrost of this village."

"But the Landrost has gone to the Spelonken!"

"The Landrost is here in the winkel, and the groote Baas Hans is with him," the man replied.

"When did the groote Baas Hans come?"

"This night he came, Inkoss. It is but two hours since I ran behind his horse from the cart which lies on the veldt. The Bushman was with him, and now there is a Boer man that takes care of the cart, and a waggon of goods that stands close by. I hear the waggon will not come to the winkel, but will go towards the rising sun."

"Well, Kechima, you say that you can run, and run you must to-night."

"To-night, Inkoss?"

"Yes, Kechima, to-night."

"But the groote Baas Hans?"

"Listen to me, and I will speak; but first let us go where there are no people." An idea struck me. My late prison door might still be open. I went towards it, the door yielded to my push, and we entered. Turning to the man I said? "Does the groote Baas Hans feed you, and does he pay you?"

"I feed wherever I can, Inkoss, and his pay has been the sjambok."

"Then, why do you stay with him? Do you love him?"

"Love him!" he replied, and I could see his dark eyes glitter. "As the serpent loves the mongoose, and as the bird loves the serpent. Inkoss, Inkoss, I hate him! but I fear him, for he has the evil eye—the eye of the Tagati."

"Kechima, that Baas Hans is bad I know well, but his eye is like that of any other man, and can do you no harm. Now tell me where you dwelt, for I know you are not of this country, and how did you come to work for the groote Baas Hans?"

"Kechima," said he, "was yet small when he left his father's kraal on the Tugela river, near the big drift where the soldiers of the great Queen passed to the Inizani valley. It was as voorlooper Kechima went into the white man's country, and as voorlooper that he entered the country of the Boer. My Baas gave me to the groote Baas Hans, and twelve times has the veldt been burnt since then."

"Twelve years," I thought, "and I suppose he has not received a cent."

"Has the Groote Baas ever given you money?" I asked.

"It is but six moons ago. I had carried the letter of the Groote Baas Hans to the Baas Landrost of Middelburg. It was from here, even unto there that I ran, and on the tenth day was back with another letter for the Groote Baas Hans; it was then that Baas Hans threw me one shilling," and after fumbling for a few seconds in his wallet, he produced a small rag, and from it a shining shilling.

"Now, Kechima," I said, "you would like once more to sleep at your father's kraal, to have one of your own, and to buy a wife?"

"Inkoss! Inkoss!" he said, trembling with excitement.

"Then listen. To-night you will go to Pietersburg—you know the way?"

"I know it well, Inkoss."

"Very good; you will take this letter there," and I produced the one I had written to Hallimond, the duplicate of which I had given to Basket to take to

Middelburg. I had not yet closed the envelope, so scribbled a few hasty words, giving him more definite details than I had done before. I closed the envelope, addressing it to the Manager of the Standard Bank, Pietersburg, and asking him kindly to forward it in an envelope of his own, to "W. Hallimond, care of the landlord, Standard Hotel, Middelburg."

"Now, Kechima, you will take this letter to the mali (money) house at Pietersburg."

"Inkoss, I know it; I have been there," he said. "I have been for the Groote Baas Hans."

"Very good, you will give this letter to the Baas mukulu (manager), and you will give him your shilling." For a moment the man's face fell, but a second later it was all smiles as I put three pounds in gold into his hand, and told him that they were for him to do what he liked with.

I saw him stow the letter safely away in his mouchi, giving him instructions to remain in Pietersburg for a week, and that if I did not turn up, he was then to go to Middelburg, and straight to the hotel; when there, he was to do whatever the landlord told him, saying that he came from me. I took my signet-ring out of my belt pocket, handed it to him, and told him that, when the landlord saw it, he would take it and keep it for me. I knew mine host would remember it, as he had noticed it on more than one occasion.

Then we crept quietly to the door. The moon had for some time been shining through the hole Basket had made during his escape.

I looked out. It was almost as bright as day, but not

a single soul was to be seen. Every now and then, in the stillness of the night, I could catch the faint notes of the concertina, and occasionally a howl, presumed to be singing, would rend the air with its discordant sound.

"Now, Kechima, go—and remember the kraal and the wife."

He took my hand and put it on his head. "Inkoss," he said, "the body of Kechima is sore, but his legs are strong, and truly it shall be said that he is the man that runs."

He glided out into the moonlight; softly he crept along. I watched him until his figure grew smaller; then he dived into some bushes.

I waited quietly in the cell for quite half an hour, but heard no sound that might cause me any uneasiness. I felt sure my messenger was safely on his way, and stepped boldly out into the broad moonlight, and almost into the arms of Long Piet.

CHAPTER XX

BLESSBOK GETS HIS FEED

"ALLERMENSER! friend," said Long Piet in a tone of great surprise, "why I have been looking for you everywhere, and who would have dreamt of seeing you here? I thought you were a spook! But come, let us get up to the canteen, or it is little sleep you will get before going on your long journey to-morrow. But where is that nigger?" and without waiting for any reply he opened the door of the cell and walked in. "Not here?" he said. "He went away with you, friend; what has become of him?"

"It is not the custom for white men in this country to go about with natives," I replied.

"Nor to take their part," was his answer. I did not take any notice of what he said, but walked on.

"You are going to your bed?" he asked.

"After I have fed my horse, but not before."

"Why, man! he has had enough to eat to-night for three horses!"

I thought so, too, but did not tell him that I had given it him.

"That may be, but if he can eat more he shall have

it," and I walked quickly in the direction of the stable, as I was anxious to see whether they had been up to any tricks with the horse during my absence. Long Piet walked sulkily at my side, but did not venture on any more remonstrance. I had arrived within eighty yards of the stable door, when a man suddenly appeared at it and walked away in the direction of my room.

"Hallo!" I said, turning to Piet, "who is this out so late?" for I was almost certain that in the bright moonlight I recognised Van der Merwe.

"It must be a stranger," he answered, but I could tell from his face he had recognised him. We entered the stable, I struck a match, lit the lantern, and walked straight to where my horse was standing. A long thin bottle was on the ground close to his fore feet and a toggle in the manger.

"Hallo!" I said, as I seized hold of the bottle and held it up, "why, what is this?"

"Ja, ja, I know," said the man without a moment's hesitation; "it is a drench for old Charley, and must have been put by your horse in mistake."

"But what is the toggle doing in my horse's manger?" I inquired.

"Ja, it is stupid," he replied, "but I know it was for old Charley," and he patted a horse next to mine.

"Oh! if that is the case, let us give it him," and I turned my head away to hide the smile I vainly endeavoured to conceal. I seized hold of the toggle as if I were going to put it on the horse he was stroking, for I had recognised the beast as being one of Van der Merwe's four-in-hand. For an instant the man did not

answer; then taking the bottle from my hand he said: "Ja, come, we will give it him," and I was not surprised to hear the bottle fall on the stone flooring and smash to a thousand pieces whilst the man cursed his own clumsiness, saying that he supposed poor old Charley would have to do without it, as he did not know where to get another drench from, and by this time they would be sure to be all a-bed. I turned round suddenly and caught him smiling, and looking anything but disappointed at the accident that deprived the horse of his medicine.

That I had stopped Van der Merve just in the nick of time was evident, and that he had guessed some one had fed my horse was also clear, for it was quite impossible for Blessbok to have already eaten all I had cut, but there was not a vestige of food remaining in his manger, and I judged that old Charley was now munching at the remains of his meal. I cut him another good supply, and then sat on the manger and watched him feed.

"Are you going to sleep at all to-night?" asked Long Piet, disconsolately.

"Maybe I shall," I replied, as I quietly settled myself back, and to all appearances must have looked as if it was a matter of the utmost indifference to me.

"It is a long journey to-morrow," said the Boer, "and you will want sleep."

"So will you," I replied, "and I should advise you to go and get some." He remained standing in exactly the same place for at least a quarter of an hour, then suddenly he left the stable, and I heard him grumbling to himself as he crossed over towards the sleeping-rooms.

It was absolutely necessary that my horse should be fit and well and up to his work on the morrow, so as the straw was certainly as good as my own bed, I walked behind the partition where the forage was kept, and threw myself down upon it, feeling pretty certain that the least noise would arouse me.

A slight sound did awake me; I could hear some one moving about amongst the horses. The day had already broken, and through a crack in the partition I at once recognised the Bushman employed by Van der Merwe. He was kneeling before a bucket of water and stirring it round with a piece of wood. Presently he seemed to be satisfied, and picking the bucket up, he carried it deliberately towards my horse and placed it down by him. But before the animal had even time to wet his lips, I was round the partition.

"What is this?" I said; "what is this you are giving my horse?" and I took him by the back of the neck and shook him until his teeth seemed to rattle. "Tell me, you villain, or I will break every bone in your body!"

"Baas, Baas," he gasped out, "it is not for your horse, it is for old Charley."

"Then why did you put it before my horse? I know you are lying, you scoundrel, but if you say it is for old Charley, then he shall drink it. Here, put that bucket before him," and I gave him another shake.

"What will the Groote Baas say? What shall I do?" he whined, and I never saw a native nearer the colour of a white man, so great was his fright.

"Your master?" I roared. "Your master is Hendrick de Villiers; if he told you to do it, why do you not give

it to the horse? Where is your master? Take me to him, and I will find out whether you are lying or not."

"He is in the canteen," said the man, forgetting everything through the fright I had put him in.

"Then come," I said, and catching him by the arm, and taking the bucket in the other hand, I dragged him out of the stable, and in less than a minute was thundering at the door of the canteen.

It would have been difficult for any one to have slumbered with the noise I was making, and through the flimsy door I distinctly heard a woman's voice say:

"Hans, Hans, get up and see what all that hammering means!"

"Ja, ja," said a sleepy voice I well knew, and at the same moment I heard a door open inside the house, and another voice that I had not forgotten chimed in with:

"What can all this mean? I will make it hot for the offender if he has not good cause."

"Ja, ja, Landrost," said Hans, "and I too."

The bolts shot back, the door was thrown open, and revealed Hendrick de Villiers, *alias* Hans Van der Merwe, standing half-dressed, with a formidable sjambok in his hand, whilst peering over his shoulder in the background stood the Landrost of the Woodbush village, my judge of a couple of days ago. As the latter caught my eye, he dived through a half-open door at his back, whilst Van der Merwe, with a look of utter astonishment on his face, and as if not knowing what to do, stood staring at me with the uplifted sjambok in his hand.

"Mr Leigh!" he said at last; "why, this is a surprise!

I thought by this time you would have been miles on your journey!"

"I might say the same of you," I replied curtly.

"Ah!" he said, "yes, but a letter intercepted me, and I was obliged to return here at once on very important business. But what can be the meaning of your rousing us out of sleep at such an early hour, and in such a noisy manner?"

"The cause is," I replied, "that I caught this man of yours trying to either poison or drug my horse, and when I took him red-handed at it, he said the mixture was for your animal. Finally, when I told him that if that was the case he was to give it to your horse before me, he grew so frightened at the suggestion that I had my suspicions; so I grabbed him, and brought him here with the bucket of water I saw him preparing. He told me that you were in the house, so now perhaps you will be able to interrogate him before me, he being your servant and the real attempt being made on my horse."

For a moment Van der Merwe stood trembling with rage as he eyed the man, and I noticed how the sjambok shook in his hand when I mentioned that the Bushman had told me he was in the house.

"Did you try to poison my horse, dog?" he yelled, as he made a rush at the man and whisked him away as if he had been a feather.

"No, no! not your horse, Baas, but the horse you told me!" shrieked the frightened native.

"You lie! you lie, you villain!" roared Hans, as he rained blow after blow on the struggling Bushman.

"Come, come," I said, walking up, "that will do, Oom Hendrick; you have given him enough."

"As you wish it shall be so, Mr Leigh," he said, as with a final cut of the heavy whip he relaxed his iron grasp on the man, who, wriggling and writhing with pain, shot away as rapidly as the shaft from the bow.

"I will teach the black devil to tamper with horses," he said indignantly, but he added, "you have done me a great service, Mr Leigh; he might have caused my horse great harm."

"But I tell you it was my horse he wanted to drug," I answered warmly.

"No, my dear sir," he replied mildly, "you must be mistaken; why should he hurt your beast? He has no reason to do so, but for me it was a different matter. I gave him a good hiding yesterday, and these Bushmen are very vindictive. It was my horse he wanted to drug, and I repeat again I owe you a service."

In this manner that scoundrel passed off the incident, imagining he had duped me. There was one word of truth he had spoken—that Bushmen are very vindictive.

Long Piet now appeared upon the scene; in all probability he had been near all the time. I could see that Hans wanted to get back into the house—no doubt to warn his wife, if he had not done so already, about the *alias* he was at present under. It did not trouble me, so I let him go without further comment, and walking back to the stable sat and saw my good nag eat a breakfast such as he did not often get; then putting the saddle and bridle on him, I led him out of the stable, and having tied him to a post outside the bar, in full

view of where I was sitting, I shouted for the native cook to bring me some breakfast.

On hearing my orders, Hans Van der Merwe emerged from a room at the side, and asked me if I would join him at his meal? I declined, saying I had already ordered, but, in reality, I was loath to break bread with such a villain.

Half an hour later, I was taking a last look at my saddle-girths, and having crammed a cheap saddle-bag with a miscellaneous collection of food, and strapped my blanket on the pommel, I signified my intention to Long Piet that I was ready to start. For some time past I had seen him hovering about my steed, but no doubt coming to the conclusion that I suspected something, and was keeping a sharp look-out, he retired from the scene, and had returned, leading a couple of horses, just as I had completed my arrangements. To his inquiry as to whether I would not like to take leave of Oom Hendrick before I started, I replied by vaulting into my saddle, and walking briskly off in the direction I had already ascertained I should have to take for Magatosburg. He grumbled out something about my being a strange Englishman, but presently I heard him coming on behind.

To my question as to who was to ride the other horse, he simply answered, "The boy," and before we had gone a quarter of a mile it was with a certain amount of astonishment that I saw the lately chastised Bushman step out into the road from behind a tree, and without saying a word, scramble up into the saddle of the led horse.

"Does it require two of you to show me the way?" I asked.

"No," said Piet; "but one must look after the horses, and that is a Kafir's work, and not a white man's."

"At any rate I shall look after my own," I replied, as I turned in my saddle and had a good look at them both.

Long Piet coloured. No doubt he was beginning to think that the Englishman was not such a fool as he had supposed, but he said nothing.

We had ridden for about a couple of hours when, on turning a sharp bend in the road, I saw a Cape cart coming towards us. It was drawn by four mules, and from the way it zigzagged across the path the Jehu could not have been an expert. As we got nearer I could see that two men were sitting in front, but, from their dress, I judged they were not Boers. One was a thick-set short man, with a very hooked nose and grizzly beard, and at a glance I saw that he was a Jew; the other, a much slighter man, with jet black eyes, fiercely curled moustache, and decidedly dark skin. His dress, too, was somewhat strange, even for that part of the Transvaal, his coat being a bright yellow, his shirt a gaudy blue, whilst his nether garments were of white duck, and kept in place by a huge red cummerbund that circled his small waist. He also mounted a pair of patent leather shoes, and from the moment he took off his huge white straw sombrero and made us a sweeping bow, I judged him to be, what he really was—a Portuguese. He held the reins as if they were tiller-lines, and it was pretty plain that driving was not one of his accomplishments.

"Allo! allo! allo!" said the man with the hooked nose; then in vile Cape Dutch as the vehicle drew up, "here we are at last. Ah! another friend, I see!" he continued, "another noble son of the soil! But where is Oom Hans? The Senhor and I could not wait any longer, so drove on here."

I had kept my eyes fixed on Long Piet, so that he could not, without my detecting him, make any sign to the new arrival. At last he blurted out, interrupting the hook-nosed man who was on the point of making a communication:

"This is an Englishman who is going to Magatosburg, and I am showing him the way; he does not know Oom Hans."

"Oh!" said the hook-nosed man, and his whole mien underwent a sudden change. "'Ow are you, Mister?" he said, addressing me in English; "'ow do you like these parts? Going a-shooting, I suppose; fine shooting there, but the 'osses die pretty quick, you'd better buy a mule; I'll sell you one cheap. Can you understand Dutch?"

"Just a little," I replied, knowing that Long Piet would not be able to take in a word of the conversation.

"Rum lingo, ain't it?" said the man. "S'elp me, I never thought four year ago, when I lived in Brummagem, that I'd 'ave got my tongue round it. So you're going shooting? Well, I don't like guns—they're nasty things; they goes off when you're never a-thinking of it; but mules—well, I do know summat about mules. You take my tip and buy that first 'un. Talk about the wind! There ain't a mule more like the wind than that

'un is." I think he would have rambled on for the next half-hour, had not Long Piet told him in Dutch that we were in a hurry, and must get on.

"Very good, Mister, very good," he said, addressing me. "You won't change your mind about the mule, will you? Cheap, cheap—dirt cheap, if you wants 'im; worth 'is weight in gold." But I assured him I did not want the animal.

"Well, then, good-day to you," he said. "I see there ain't no biz to be done to-day. Rum chaps, them Boer fellows," he continued, looking hard at me; "rum lot of blokes. Good job that thick-'eaded 'un don't understand English; but take a tip from Solomon Isaacs—look after your 'orse!" And with a "Gee-up! get on, will you?" the strange pair went on their way.

CHAPTER XXI

A STORM

PUSHING on rapidly, ere sunset we had arrived at the south-east extremity of the Majaja range of hills, situated, as the crow flies, only about eighty miles from Pietersburg. For a considerable time I had watched their rugged peaks as they stood out sharp and bold in the setting sun, but as we neared the base, their height was lost to view by the dense bush and huge forest trees that covered their slopes.

Bright as the sky was then, I knew that it would not long remain so. The ominous rumble of distant thunder, the death-like stillness that prevailed in the air, and the tiny little black cloud, seeming no bigger than a man's hand, that far, far away in the west I had caught sight of, all told of the approaching storm.

The horses seemed to know it too, and pushed on over the rough beaten track, as if eager to find some place of shelter before the tempest broke.

How suddenly these storms arise is only known to those who have lived in tropical climates. Ten minutes before, except for the tiny black spot, the heavens had been cloudless; but already, as if by magic, a great dark curtain was spread across the western sky. The

rumbling grew more and more distinct, and every now and then the great black cloud would appear as if a roaring furnace were within its folds, for a glow, as that of a burning house seen at a great distance, would seem to quiver for a second in its blackness. On, on, swiftly but silently, on came the great cloud; in those brief moments the light of day had gone, and a great darkness, made more dark by the overhanging trees, was upon us.

A low, sighing, sobbing moan amongst the trees, a drop of rain, another, and another, and with a crashing, deafening peal of thunder, and a blinding flash of forked lightning, the storm burst with all its fury upon us. Peal after peal of thunder seemed to shake the very ground on which we stood; flash after flash of lightning succeeded one another so rapidly that it would have been an impossibility to count them. The rain could scarcely be called rain, for it came down in one solid sheet of water, and in less than one minute I was as wet through as on the day I had taken my jump into the pan, and its deep waters had closed over my head.

For a few seconds I sat on my horse, the animal under me trembling in every limb. Dismounting, I stood by him holding the bridle, preferring to remain exposed to the fury of the tempest to taking shelter under one of the huge trees that surrounded the spot where I stood. It was well I did so, and it would have been better had we all done so. A hissing sound as of a shell close by me, a terrific explosion, a blinding flash, the smell of something burning, and then, as if

satisfied with its deadly work, the storm fiend passed away, the clouds broke, and the blue sky peeped through. But the body of the little Bushman lay still in death, for the same flash that had blasted the life of one of the giants of the forest, had killed the native also.

"Allermenser! friend," said a voice close behind me. I turned, to see Long Piet. His face was ashy pale, and it was quite apparent that, in spite of the grin he put on, he had been in what might be called "a blue funk." "One can see you are an Englishman," he continued, "or you would not have stood by your horse when the lightning was so bad"—the Boers have a theory that a sweating horse attracts lightning—"but it is better to be lucky than wise."

"Look here!" I said, as I pointed to the body of the Bushman.

"What is the matter with him?" he asked.

"Can't you see?"

"Ja," he answered, as he coolly inspected the corpse, "he is dead, so let us go on."

"And leave him like that?" I asked.

"Why not?" was the answer; "he is only a Bushman, and there are plenty of jackals, if not lions, about here," and he laughed, and walking up to the dead man, was about to unbuckle a small strap that hung round his waist.

"What are you about to do?" I said.

"To see if he has a stray sixpence here," he answered, as he touched a small leathern pouch.

"Drop that, Long Piet! drop that, or by Heaven!—"

and here I whipped out my revolver, "I'll put a bullet through you!" He stood erect and gazed at me in blank astonishment.

"Why all this fuss about a Bushman? Would you have me leave his good money, if he has any, here? Why, what can be the matter with the Englishman?"

"The matter is this," I replied, "that you will neither take his money, nor will he be left like that, if I have to stop here all night. So, Long Piet, until I can find some hole to put him in, or he has been properly covered with big stones, I do not go from this place, and if you want to continue your journey, you will do so alone."

I heard him muttering something about "the mad Englishman," but seeing that I was determined, he set about to help me to collect a fair quantity of large boulders, and in the course of an hour we had erected a rough cairn, under which lay that child of the forest.

Then mounting our horses, and leading the little pony he had ridden we left him, for the bushes and trees, when the soft night winds blew, to whisper the story of his tragic end.

As we rode slowly on, picking our way over the rough path and slippery boulders, made more slippery by the recent downpour, I could not help remarking the sullen appearance and behaviour of my companion, and the monosyllables by which he answered the few questions I had occasion to put to him. It was evident he was brooding over the loss of the loot he had expected to derive from our late companion. As far

as his conversation went, the loss of it troubled me very little, but I could not help realising the fact that I was more or less at his mercy — I did not know the country we were travelling through, and he might lead me where he liked, and except for my revolver I had no arms, whilst on the other hand he carried a Martini rifle and a bandolier of cartridges.

I inwardly resolved that, cost what it might, I would become possessed of a weapon on the first opportunity; even an old "gas-pipe," as the ancient muzzle-loaders used by the natives are called, would be better than nothing. At present, as matters stood, should we have another difference, there was nothing in the world easier for him than to choose his time and place, and when out of range of my little pea-shooter, to riddle me with bullets. From what I had seen of his character, I felt convinced that, situated as I was, he was not a safe companion to travel with.

These pleasant reflections were interrupted by an ejaculation of disgust from my sulky companion, and the pleasant information that we were on the wrong path—in fact, that he had lost the way.

My late show of anger had cowed him, and prevented his showering his direct spleen on me, so the ill-fated Bushman came in for it all. When he had wasted all the Boer words he could think of, to show his disgust of the Bushmen in particular and the natives in general, he turned, and said roughly: "What shall we do, Englishman?"

I did not answer for a few moments but sat and thought.

"This is what you call a road in your country?" I asked.

"Ja, it is a road," he answered; "but if I had my way a thousand of those black devils would be working on it, with a thousand sjamboks to keep them at it until it was fit for a white man to ride on."

I did not take any notice of the latter part of his answer, but said: "Then if this is a road, I suppose it leads to somewhere, so I say, let us keep on, the night is yet young, and if we have to off-saddle we might find a better place than here."

"Ja," he said, as he gave his horse a heavy dig with his spur, which caused the jaded animal to jump forward, only to be almost thrown on its haunches by the savage tug he made at the heavy Bedouin bit, as he cursed it for not keeping still.

So on we went again, plod, plod, splash, splash. In this way we must have ridden another hour when we came to a path that branched off to the left, and my companion grew more amiable, telling me that he recognized the road. He was about to take the path, when I chanced to see two or three lights right ahead of us.

"Hallo!" I said, "you are taking the wrong path; look at those lights!"

"I know there are lights," he said in an insolent manner, "but you must follow me down here, and in three-quarters of an hour we shall reach the bush veldt house of my friend Carl Trichardt."

The tone of his voice irritated me, and what was more, I was not at all anxious to know any of his boon

companions; so I answered as sharply as he had spoken to me:

"You can go on for three-quarters of an hour if you like, but I am going to those lights; my horse is tired, and so am I, so I'm off," and I walked briskly away.

"Baas, Baas," he said hurriedly, "you cannot go that way—that is the wrong way; come with me, Mijn Heer." His words seemed almost an entreaty, and it was the first time since I knew him that he had been so polite. There must be some meaning in it; he must have some great object in keeping me away from the beacons before me. This made me all the more determined, so without waiting to parley, I lightly touched my horse's side, and started in a direct line for the glimmering lights before me. The fires got more numerous, and in a very short space of time I found myself in the midst of a large Kafir kraal or village. Some groups of men were sitting round the fire One of them arose at my approach and came straight up to me. He held a burning faggot in his hand; as I reined up, he put his arm in the air and shouted:

"Sakabona, Inkoss!" (I greet you, chief).

The other men hearing the salutation came round, but kept at a respectful distance. I addressed them in Zulu, for there are few South African races that do not know that tongue. I said that I was wet, tired, and hungry, that my horse too was done up and wanted food. The ring opened, and an old man stepped up to me.

"White man!" he said, "you are welcome, and more than welcome, for even now I see you are one of the children of the great white Queen that lives beyond the

great water where the sun sets. I have been to Durban," he continued with a ring of pride in his voice, "and I know the mulungu is of that race." Turning round he gave some orders. Two young men stepped up; one removed my saddle and placed it on his head and beckoned me to follow him, the other took off my horse.

Arriving at a larger hut than those around me, he entered through the low hole or doorway, I following him. Putting down my saddle he retired, returning in a few minutes with an empty bottle, in the neck of which was stuck an ordinary candle. It was apparent from the way he handed it to me that I was a very honoured guest. Placing it on the floor, I took a survey of my premises. The hut was round and of a fair size, perhaps twice as big as an army bell-tent. At the far end was a heap of dried grass, and a large sheepskin kaross lay beside it. Satisfied that I was well accommodated for the night, I mentioned the word "horse." The boy grinned.

"He is eating much," he said.

"I will see him," I replied.

Without another word the boy dived through the opening; I followed. In less than a minute I had arrived at another square-built hut, but with only a covering overhead and on three sides. The boy had spoken the truth; Blessbok was eating hard, and from the manner in which he ground the mealies and munched the chaff, I knew he had all that he required to make him comfortable and happy.

I returned to my hut, and after swallowing a huge bowl of mealie meal porridge, and drinking half a calabash of

Kafir beer, oblivious to all my surroundings, I slept as comfortably as on the best spring mattress or feather bed ever made, until the crowing of many cocks, mingled with the voices of men and women, told me that the dawn of another day was breaking.

CHAPTER XXII

THE QUEEN OF THE MAJAJAS

AS I emerged from the hut and walked out into the fresh morning air, I was greeted on all sides by the salutation of "Sakabona, mulungu!" and men, women, and children seemed to vie in offering me tokens of respect. It was pretty clear to me that I was looked upon as a person of consequence. I overheard one man say, "The white man has slept in the great kraal, therefore must be the friend of our Queen."

I went down to a clear, running brook, some fifty yards off, and had a good wash. Though at a respectful distance, my movements were watched with great interest by these simple folk, and when I drew out a comb and proceeded to do my hair, their excitement knew no bounds, and they began to clap their hands and dance. Returning to the hut, I was met at the door by the youth who had attended me the night before. I asked him about my horse.

"He eats," he said, with a broad grin; "the white man, too, must eat, and the food is in his kraal."

I soon disposed of a very fair quantity of roast goat's meat, some wild honey, and a few eggs, the boy standing near me all the time. When he saw I had

finished my repast, he told me his Queen would like to speak with the white man, and that she now sat beneath the big tree that covered her kraal.

"I am ready," I said.

Without another word he ran out of the hut, but returned almost immediately, followed by two old men. One carried a large green bough, the other a bullock's horn, on which he every now and then performed a kind of bugle call. The man with the horn now asked me to follow him. So, with the horn blowing in front, and the bough waving behind, we started in the direction of a large tree about a hundred yards off, the rest of the people following at a short distance.

As I approached the tree I noticed that a solitary hard wooden chair was placed beneath it, and that within a yard of it a large grass mat was spread. On it sat huddled up one of the most extraordinary figures I had ever seen.

When I was about a dozen yards from the mat, the Queen of the Majaja tribe, for it was she, rose to her feet, and thus gave me a better opportunity of scrutinising her strange appearance. Her form, which was bent double with age, was covered with a miscellaneous collection of leopard skins and ostrich feathers, her long, skinny arms being bare to the shoulder. Two massive gold armlets were fitted just above the elbow of each arm, and her bare ankles, which peeped out beneath the leopard skins, were also decorated with anklets of the same precious metal.

But the most striking part of her appearance was her head. In place of the short curly wool that in-

variably covers the head of the negress, long, flowing, white locks, that reached to her knees, fell in a tangled mass about her, and now that I had come close to her, I noticed that instead of black, her skin was of a yellow tint, and that the profile of her countenance was decidedly European.

Some suppose that she is of Portuguese descent, but none can speak with authority, for, according to the oldest men of her tribe, she was as she stood before me when they were little children, and, by their reckoning, she must have been considerably over one hundred years old; but no one knows, or is ever likely to, for she never speaks of her early days, and many are inclined to believe that she never had any!

"Thou art welcome, O white man! welcome to the children of the Majaja nation and their Queen," saying which she sat down on her mat, and beckoned me to take the chair.

In the meantime the people had formed themselves into a semi-circle at about twenty yards from us—the tree, the old Queen and myself, forming the background. We sat diligently looking at each other for quite a minute, then she turned her head towards me, and began in a low voice, gradually getting higher:

"O white man! who comes from across the big waters where the great White Queen lives, to thee would I tell the woes of my people, and ask for counsel and advice."

"Nay, mother," I said, "how do you know that I am not of the white people of this land?"

"There are those here who have met you in the place

where the water-stones (diamonds) are found. They never forget a friend, nor do they ever forget an enemy," and her eyes flashed as she laid emphasis on the last word. "But my children remember with joy the white man who has come to their kraal, for have they not eaten of his food, taken his money, and the sjambok was not used?"

I suspected that some "boy" who had worked for me in Kimberley must have recognised me; and so it proved later on.

"My heart is sad," went on the old woman, "for my children suffer much. Of the children of the great White Queen, who dig for the water-stones or for the iron that blinks like the sun (gold)"—here she touched her armlets—"all are not bad, some there are, but the number is few. But the white men who live in this land, the men who drive the oxen, who live on the farms, who keep the sheep, all, all are bad bad, bad!" As she uttered the last words she clapped her hands together, and a murmur of approval went round the assembled throng.

I remained silent for want of something to say.

"Listen, O white man," she continued. "My children, they go far; for nigh a moon they travel towards the setting sun. Like to the fox, the jackal, and the ant-bear, they burrow in the ground, for they tell me the water-stones and the iron that glistens like the sun lie deep; but of this they have no fault to find, for before twelve moons have gone, they have wherewith to purchase many oxen, or the wives they may desire. Of meat they too have a little, and of meal they have

their fill, so therefore, why should they speak ill of the white man that calls you brother? Of those who dwell about this land, those who drive the ox, and keep the sheep, it is different. For them my children fain would not work, but it is forced on them; meat they never smell, the meal is scarce, and for their pay, the sjambok! It is with tongues of honey they come to my people, an ox they promise, perhaps six sheep, a mare or ten goats for the work of twelve moons; but, when the eleventh moon has passed, and the task is done, the ox is not forthcoming, the sheep are not yet born, and of mare and goats there are none, and should my child ask for his due, the sjambok is his portion! Their tongues are crooked, for they all lie. Have I spoken true, my people?"

Another murmur of assent went through the assembled crowd.

I knew that she was speaking the truth, that it is a common custom amongst the Boers to engage the services of natives under the promises she had just enumerated, that they were seldom if ever kept, and that too often the sjambok was the only payment that was ever received for a year's hard work.

"You do not speak," said the old woman, as she watched me closely.

"Nay, mother," I said, "what can I say? I know it is too true."

Without appearing to notice my answer she went on: "I have told you much. O white man! I have told you much, but there is more—far more to tell. It is as true as the sun rises yonder," here she pointed to the east. "Even when my children have earned their wage

from the white man your brother, yet still are they like unto the dead ox that lies upon the veldt, for the men of this country are like the aars-vogel (vulture) that feeds upon it. They wait for my children, and many there are who arrive back at their kraal with their hands as empty as the day they set forth towards the setting sun. To some of my children these men of sheep and oxen give strong waters that they sleep much; but when the day comes, and they would go on their journey, lo! the strap they held so fast is either empty or has gone. Many I hear never awake from their slumbers, and are lying near the banks of the Groote Olifants river, and yet still worse has happened to others, for without being offered meat or drink, they have been waylaid upon the path, as the lion waits for the doe, and the fruits of their toil have been wrested from them whilst the sjambok cut their flesh. O white man! what I have spoken is true," and as she uttered these words she buried her face in her hands, and I saw the tears trickling through her skinny fingers.

A deep murmur ran round the throng of black faces that fronted me. Some of the men sprang to their feet and shook their clenched fists in the air, whilst the women wagged their heads and called to each other that "it is bad that our mother should weep."

I began to feel very uncomfortable. It was quite evident that their chieftainess expected me to say something. At last I turned to her, and said: "What can I, a white man from across the big water, do in this land, and why do you tell me all this, mother?"

"You can do much," said the old Queen, as all signs

of her late grief passed away. "The great White Queen across the big water is your mother, even as she is ours. Tell her how her children suffer; tell her that they ask for her aid, that she may shake her assegai, and lo! the drivers of oxen and keepers of sheep would be like unto the jackal when the dogs are loose—quiver and tremble, and crawl into the deepest part of their hole! Do this. O white man! speak as I have asked you, and the children of the Majaja will tell with joy of the day that led thee to their kraals."

I was saved making any reply, for at that moment a horse's foot was heard behind us. The whole assembly who had been squatting on their haunches, rose to their feet, and a minute later Long Piet rode up to where I was sitting. A cloud passed over the face of the old Queen.

"Is that man your friend?" she said.

"He is no friend of mine," I answered, and the next minute he had thrown himself from the saddle and was by my side.

The old Queen looked from me to Long Piet, then back at me, and for a second a doubtful expression passed over her wrinkled face, then turning away from the Boer without having addressed a single word to him, almost bent double with age, and leaning heavily on a thick staff, she slowly walked towards her hut which was situated about twenty yards from where she sat. As no one appeared to help her, I went up to her and offered her my arm. She refused it, saying; "No, white man; the Mother of the Majaja walks not with the friend of those who oppress her people." This was spoken almost in a whisper.

"He is not a friend of mine, mother."

"That is good," she answered, as she took hold of my sleeve, "beware! O white man, of him they call Long Piet; to my children he is well known, and yet you are with him, and are not his friend?"

"I say I am no friend of his," I repeated emphatically.

"The white man's tongue speaks straight, I can see it in his face: beware of the Long Piet; it is the Mother of the Majaja who speaks to you, beware!" and with this warning the old woman entered her hut, and I never saw her again.

As I returned towards the Boer I saw that he had coolly taken possession of my chair, and a sort of half sneer, half leer was on his face.

"The old woman seems mighty friendly with the Englishman," he said as I came up to him, "though she did not offer me the morning greeting, and I a burgher of the land."

I did not take any notice of his remark but simply said: "I am going to get my horse, are you ready?"

I did not wait for his answer, though I heard him mumble out something, but walked towards the place where my horse had been stabled. Arriving at old Blessbok's stable I found that a new hand had taken charge of him. As we stood we could be seen from where the Boer was seated. The boy put on the bridle, and as he did so said in a low voice:

"Does not the master remember Charley, where the water-stones are found?"

I looked at my interlocutor, and in the big muscular man who stood before me. recognised the youth who

some years before had worked for me in Kimberley, and to whom I had given the name of Charley.

"Charley!" I said, "Charley! Why, how did you get here?"

"This is the land of my fathers," he replied. "But speak low, master, the Boer man is looking at you."

"But I need not fear the Boer man," I replied.

"The master fears nothing, Charley knows," was the answer. "But the master does not know the Long Piet; Charley does—so do his people. But," he continued, and his voice trembled, "a day will come, and it is not far distant—even the worm will turn, how much more the mamba that now is only sleeping? Inkoss, Inkoss, you have heard the words of our mother; they are true, all true, Charley knows; for was not the work of his hands for nigh twenty moons taken from him on the high veldt by the sons of this land, and more than twice that number of cuts laid on his back with the sjambok! The time is not yet ready, but soon it will come; then the cry of the Majaja shall be heard throughout the land, and the men of sheep and oxen, who beat and steal, and kill and lie, will not forget it!"

"That black devil takes long enough to saddle up," said a voice close beside me; "if he were doing my work he should do it quicker, or this good friend should speak to him," and he shook the heavy whip he held in his hand.

I turned, to find Long Piet at my elbow. He had come up so quietly from the back of the shed that we had not heard him, and how long he had been a listener to our conversation it was impossible to tell; nor were there any signs on his face that he had heard anything

He had left his horse standing where he had first dismounted. The man Charley had understood his remarks, and an angry gleam shot from his dark eyes; but he controlled himself, and turning to me, said quietly:

"Inkoss, the horse is ready; shall I lead him out?'

In a couple of minutes we were both in the saddle and walking away towards a low range of hills that lay almost direct east from the kraals.

My departure was very different from my arrival, for the place seemed as if deserted; not a soul showed out of the huts, nor a single word was uttered to speed us on our way. We jogged quietly on, and had gone about a mile, when I heard a man running behind us, and, turning in my saddle, to my astonishment saw Charley.

"The Inkoss has forgotten these," he said, as he thrust a splendid sporting Martini-Henry rifle and a bandolier of cartridges into my hands, and before I could say a word of remonstrance or thanks, he dived into the bush at the side of the rough path, and disappeared.

Whether it was Charley's gift, or that of his Queen, to this day I have never known, but I felt myself a different man as I handled the weapon, and slung the bandolier across my shoulder.

"Allermenser!" said Long Piet, "these are strange doings, for a white man to take arms from a black one."

"Who says I took them?" I asked. "How do you know I did not buy them?" but at the last words I bit my tongue with vexation as I knew I had made matters worse.

"Buy them!" he said, "buy them, indeed! And since when may the black folk in this land trade in arms? Our field-cornet will have something to say about this when he gets to hear of it. How did these black devils get the arms? However, we shall see later. The old woman who did not give Long Piet greeting when he came to her kraals, or offer meat and drink, will have cause to remember it; Long Piet is not the man to forget in a hurry."

It was very plain to me that he was about as angry as he could be, but I had had enough of his nonsense, so, turning in my saddle, I said:

"Look here, Long Piet, or whatever they call you, I have had quite enough of you and your bad temper, so you go your way, and I will go mine. I reckon I can get a guide from the same place where I got a rifle."

It was marvellous to note the change these words produced; in a second he was cringing and making all kinds of apologies.

"No, no, Englishman," he said, "I only spoke in jest. The way would be very long if we had not something to talk about."

"If that is the way you speak to your own race, you need not try it on with me," I answered.

"No, Mijn Heer, no," was the reply, "I am at fault; I shall not do it. The English are not like the Boer men."

"No, thank God, they are not!" I replied, and we jogged slowly on.

CHAPTER XXIII

A NARROW ESCAPE

IN the early part of the afternoon we arrived on the west bank of the Molotootsie river, and here we off-saddled. Long Piet was affability itself, and strove all he could to once more ingratiate himself in my good books. I wondered at the time why this sudden change of front had again occurred, as on a former occasion when I had threatened to leave him, but it was not until some time later that I found out.

We remained here for some three hours. Our twenty-mile ride from the Majaja village, through a blazing sun, had somewhat taken it out of Long Piet's horse, but old Blessbok seemed nearly as fresh as ever.

We made the inevitable coffee, and sat down in the shade of a huge tree and smoked. We had another sixteen miles before us, as we purposed reaching the Tabanyana river that night.

The broad Molotootsie, with its sparkling clear water, tree-covered banks, the long waving grass, with every here and there an arum lily peeping out, and the cloudless blue sky above, all tended to make a

picture that recalled the childish ideas of what Fairy-land must be. Half dozing, half musing over these old fancies, I was recalled to my senses by the grating voice of my companion.

"Englishman," he said, "can they shoot in your country?"

"There are many who can," I replied, "and shoot well."

"I did not know it. I thought they could not shoot, for your redcoats made but a poor figure in the war."

"There will be a different song to sing if it happens again," I answered, for I felt annoyed at the taunting manner in which the fellow spoke. He did not reply at once, then said:

"If you can shoot, there is a chance of getting something for our supper to-night instead of bultong or the tinned meat you have with you. Look there," he continued as he pointed with his finger across the river to a spot about four hundred yards from where we sat. "Can you see anything?"

I fixed my gaze on the place indicated. The grass moved a little, a pair of long spiral horns appeared, then I saw the head of an antelope, and a second later he was standing on the banks of the river, holding his head up, and to all appearance, from the distance he was off, sniffing at the air. I had slipped in a cartridge, raised my rifle—the animal seemed to have seen us; he made a spring, and as he did so, I fired.

"Missed!" said Long Piet, with a grin.

"I do not think so," I answered; "look at the grass how it shakes."

"You are right, Englishman," said the Boer, and with a tone of annoyance; "you have hit your mark."

An hour later we found that it was true, for, crossing the river, we made for the spot, and three or four yards inside the long grass lay the dead body of a magnificent bushbok, which, after skinning and cutting up—a process at which Long Piet seemed an adept—we slung in equal portions across our pommels, and proceeded on our way.

Bright as the first part of the day had been, there were not wanting indications that before long we should have a repetition of the storm of the preceding afternoon. In this part of the country, at certain seasons of the year, hardly a day passes without this kind of visitation. They are almost as regular as clockwork, and usually come on in the latter part of the afternoon. We had not gone a quarter of our way when down came the rain, and, if possible, the peals of thunder and blinding flashes of lightning seemed more awful than ever. Of shelter there was plenty, but our experience of the day before made us chary of seeking cover under trees, so, in spite of a perfect deluge, we plodded slowly on. It was late in the evening before we accomplished our sixteen miles. The sun, which after the storm passed over had shone out as bright as ever, had sunk to rest, and the broad waters of the Tabanyana, now considerably swollen by the heavy rains of the last two days, looked deep, dark, and sullen.

We were wet through to the skin. About half a mile from the opposite bank of the river, we caught sight of

some Kafir huts. It would be folly to remain where we were, so, in spite of the heavy volume of water that swept swiftly on between us and the village, we decided to take our chance and cross.

Taking off some of our drenched clothes, and removing our boots, we rolled them up into bundles, and strapped them on our saddles; then leading our horses down to the edge, we were on the point of stepping in, when Long Piet turned to me, and said:

"Can you swim, Englishman?"

"Yes," I replied, "I can."

"That is well," he said, and a moment later we were both breasting the current. We held our horses' bridles and swam on their up-side, that is, on the high side of the stream, otherwise one is liable to be kicked, as the swiftness of the river carries the animal down on you. The Boer was a good swimmer, and was leading by about six yards, when I saw a large branch of a tree bearing down upon him. I shouted, but he did not hear me, and the next instant I saw him swept away from his horse and carried down the stream. He seemed to have got entangled in the branches. I saw him go under, then rise, then he sank again. As he rose to the surface for the second time, he gave a shriek.

"O God! Englishman!" was all he could say. For a moment I was irresolute; then leaving my horse I headed direct for him.

I was within a yard of him when he again sank. I dived, and caught hold of something. Still down, down we seemed to go. I touched the rough bottom with my feet; I pushed it with all my might, and still with my

bundle I shot up to the surface. A narrow tongue of land lay before me; I struck out for it. The current carried me out towards the centre of the stream. I made one herculean effort, and was gliding swiftly by, when the root of a great tree came within my grasp. I seized it—it held, and with a mighty effort I dragged myself and the still form of my companion on to the bank.

I lay on the ground exhausted, but there was no time to waste. Rousing myself, I bent over Long Piet: there was still a slight motion of the heart. More than once I had witnessed the treatment of half-drowned men, and after ten minutes' application I had the satisfaction of hearing a sigh. Another quarter of an hour, and he opened his eyes; then a look of recognition passed over his white features. He shuddered, then said in a weak voice:

"Ah! Englishman, I was nearly gone, and it is you who have saved me—you!"

Our situation was not a pleasant one. In the brief space of time which had elapsed since we entered the water, darkness had come, and with it a light breeze had sprung up. At any other time it would have been pleasant, but, in our present half-drowned, drenched condition, it sent a chill right through us. I know what I felt, and from the manner in which Long Piet shivered, he must have been equally as miserable.

"Come," I said, as I gave him a smart smack on the bare back, for his trousers were all the clothes he now possessed, and I was reduced to my shirt, "let us be moving; it is no good sitting here and perishing with cold."

"Ja, Englishman, ja," he said, "but I feel half-dead."

"There will be no half about it if you stop here much

longer," I replied; "look! the water is rising and will soon be over the bank!"

"True, true," he said in a startled voice, and making an effort he got on his legs; "but where are we going?" he asked as he leaned on my arm.

"Why, to the huts, of course," I replied; "where else should we go to?"

"That would be all very well if we had our horses, our rifles, some clothes and money, but, believe me, Englishman, the men who live there are not over-friendly to the Boer people."

"I am not a Boer," I said; "we can but try, so come on." But the bank was not so easy to climb as I thought, and as we gained it we found that a long row of cacti barred the way up the stream, so there was nothing for it but to make a wider circuit and go down stream. And well it was for me that we had, for scarcely had we gone a hundred yards when, to my great joy, I almost tumbled against old Blessbok, who was quietly munching away at the grass as if nothing in the slightest had occurred to upset his equilibrium. In spite of his swim, except for being wet through, everything I had strapped on his back was perfectly safe, and I lost no time in donning a few more clothes, and making a more respectable appearance. Even my rifle was safe, and the ammunition being the Government brass cartridge had not suffered at all.

"We are in luck!" I said to Long Piet.

"Speak for yourself, Englishman," he said in a surly tone; "I say, speak for yourself, for my horse is still missing."

"This," I thought, "is the man I have just risked my life for, and saved from a watery grave!" I felt so disgusted that I made no reply.

So swift had been the current that the spot at which we had found a landing must have been half a mile down the stream from where we had taken the water on the opposite bank, and we had another good half-mile to go before we could find an opening through the dense tangle of vegetation that skirted the bank. But our troubles were not yet over, for on approaching the village we found that it was perched almost on the brink of a precipice, which from the far side of the river had seemed but sloping ground; so there was nothing for it but to make a longer round, returning on it as if coming from the east, instead of the west, our true direction. No doubt there must have been some shorter footpath, but the darkness of the night concealed it.

At almost every footstep Long Piet had some fault to find. Either it was too cold, or some thorn pricked him or stone cut his foot, for he had lost his boots, and had I any to offer him they would have been far too small. Altogether, though a giant in stature, he was a perfect pigmy in heart and spirits. But every lane has a turning, and at last we struck a path that appeared to lead us direct to our goal. The heavens had got brighter, soon the moon shot up from behind a distant hill, and as we strode along to the now easily discernible cluster of huts, our approach was heralded by the barking of a pack of dogs.

Coming nearer, we saw that the kraals were surrounded by a strong palisade or stockade, and walking up to

what appeared to be the chief entrance, we waited patiently outside. In spite of the yelping and barking, no one seemed to show the least inclination to ascertain the reason; so after the lapse of about ten minutes, unable longer to stand this kind of treatment, I commenced hallooing as loud as I could bawl: "Come out! come out! and see the white men, that they may speak with you!" Except for increased yelping and barking on the part of the dogs, a dead silence prevailed in the village. I seized my rifle and slipped in a cartridge.

"What are you about to do, Englishman?" asked Long Piet.

"To show them that I can speak in another way," I replied; and before he could say another word, I pointed my piece in the air and fired. The report had scarcely died away when the whole place was in an uproar. Men called and shouted to each other, women shrieked, and the noise of the dogs was almost deafening. After a minute or so of this bedlam, the hubbub subsided, and putting my lungs to their utmost test I again shouted: "Come out! come out! that the white men, your friends, may speak with you!"

We must have cut a queer spectacle as we stood in the full light of the moon, and no doubt a hundred eyes were watching us. Long Piet was hatless and bootless, his huge slouching frame was adorned by the wet trousers that were still clinging to him and a spare coat of mine that reached about half-way down to his waist, leaving visible a broad band of the covering that nature provided for his bones. For myself, though I retained

my smasher hat, and wore boots, a shirt, and those commodities that are indispensable in civilised society, I could hardly have been a mark of grandeur even to the simple-minded folk we had to parley with. After many admonitions in Kafir to the yelping curs to keep silence, accompanied by no small amount of beatings, a voice called out: "Who are you, who call yourselves friends, to come with fire and awaken the peaceful slumbers of the children of the Umbufan?"

"We are but friends that claim your shelter," I replied; "and is it not fire that warms the heart and makes the blood run quick?"

"Yours is the fire of blood alone," came the reply; "but from whence have you come, and whither are you going? That we will know before we give you food and shelter."

"We come from the setting sun, and go to see the great chief Magato," I replied.

"Why does my father speak with a forked tongue?" said the voice, "for it is from where the sun rises you now have come."

It was evident those lynx-eyed rascals had seen us for some time, probably were aware of our misfortune at the crossing of the river; and, now that I came to think of it, it did seem strange our disaster had not been witnessed. For a moment I was stuck for a reply. Inside the palisade I could hear low chuckles and subdued laughter. The native has a keen sense of humour, and, not unlike his white brother, he relishes it the more when it is at the expense of a person he does not like. Could it be possible that they took me

for a Boer? It was worth putting to the test; so after a pause I said:

"Is it thus the children of the great chief Umbufan treat those of the great White Queen who come to ask for food and shelter?"

At these words there was some low murmuring, and the same voice said:

"Art thou a son of the great White Queen who lives over the big water?"

"I am her child," I replied.

"How can that be?" came the answer, "for he who is with you is well known to the children of the Umbufan. His arm is long, and the sjambok that he uses is heavy, for there are those of our people who have travelled to the Woodbush village; and is he not the friend of Hans?"

Judging from Long Piet's expression he did not relish the turn the conversation was taking, but there was no escape, and he knew it.

"What you say is true," I replied, "but neither Hans nor he are friends of mine. He goes but with me to show me the way to the great chief Magato." As I said these words Long Piet turned towards me.

"Allermenser! Baas," he said, "why do you speak so? I will give you all I have if you but say I am your friend." As this consisted of a wet pair of trousers, it was not a magnificent offer, but though I had spoken the truth, I was determined, if I could help it, he should come to no harm, so I went on by saying:

"But those who travel for the good of the children of the great White Queen must pass without harm."

"That is true," came the reply; "and if you are her true child, it shall be done as you say."

I was going to pour out all my eloquence to prove my claim, when I was saved the trouble. A new voice now shouted out:

"You Englishman, Sah? Have bin Durban, Sah? Seen him plenty sheeps dat come from big water Sah?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have been to Durban and know the ships there."

"Him know Misser Johnson, dat keep him big canteen?"

"Yes, I know Mr Johnson well," I replied, "and Mr Fred, his son."

"Massa Fred, he, he, he!" came from the voice inside, "him English gemmelman—him know Massa Fred; dat am good! Good Baas, Massa Fred!"

No doubt this genius would have gone on all night airing his command of the English tongue, but I heard a few words said in a low tone. Half a dozen bars were removed from the palisade; a voice shouted:

"Come in, Sah—come in, Sah," and, leading old Blessbok by the bridle, and closely followed by Long Piet, I entered the stockade.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMONG THE NATIVES

SCARCELY had old Blessbok's tail passed through the entrance, when the heavy wooden bars that had been removed to admit us were hastily replaced, and I knew that, to all intents and purposes, we were prisoners. I fingered my revolver, which, with my other belongings, I had saved, and slipped into my pocket. The enclosure was bigger than one would be inclined to believe from the outside view by moonlight. The man who had spoken in English met me immediately I had entered.

"Dis way, Sah, dis way; de big Umbufan will talkee wid de Massa."

He turned and I followed him. A motley crowd of men, women, and children gathered round us, the former carrying torches; and in this manner we arrived before a large hut situated in the middle of the enclosure.

The torch-bearers formed a ring, leaving the two parts of the circle that touched the door of the hut open. A minute later, a head appeared through the aperture, and the gigantic frame of a huge native, dressed in all the finery of his war-paint, and carrying three assegais and an ox-hide shield, stood before us.

"White man from beyond the big waters!" he said in a deep voice, "you are welcome to the kraal of Umbufan! The man of this land can also abide here, eat my food, and drink my chuala, but I do not say that he is welcome." The eyes of all turned on the big Boer who stood at my side, and Long Piet looked anything but comfortable.

"The white man has heard the words of Umbufan," I replied; "they are the words of a man." A murmur of approbation went up from the bystanders as I said this.

"You have spoken well," said the chief. "You are hungry and would eat, tired and would sleep; on the morrow when the sun has risen we will talk," and he disappeared into the hut.

I was wondering what was going to be the next move, when my loquacious friend broke in with:

"Yas, Sah; give him plenty eat, Sah; Boer man too, Sah; horse eat too, Sah; come plenty time quick dis way, Sah," and with these words he marched off towards the other end of the enclosure, and, escorted by two or three men with their torches, we followed. We arrived in front of a solitary hut placed at some distance from the others; here our guide halted.

"Dis you house, Sah," he said, pointing to it; "got oder house for him Boer man." But when Long Piet heard that he would have to occupy another hut to the one I was to be in, his fears knew no bounds.

"No, Englishman," he said, "if we are to be murdered, let it be together. Tell them I am your friend, that we are like two brothers, that we cannot be separated.

Do this, Englishman, and this night you shall hear from my lips things that concern you greatly. I swear what I am saying is true. There is much I know of that concerns you."

He spoke in Cape Dutch. The men who surrounded us did not understand it, but they guessed that he was afraid, and a look of contempt and scorn spread over their dusky features.

"Let the white man sleep in my kraal," I said to our interpreter.

"Yas, Sah—yas, Sah," was the reply, and then in an aside to his companions, "is it right that a dog should sleep with his master?" They made no reply, but wagged their heads.

To my great relief my saddle was lifted off old Blessbok, and put inside the hut. I now felt convinced that no harm was intended, and entered into the kraal without any qualm of fear. Long Piet followed me, and threw himself down in a corner.

"Times have come to a fine pass," he said, "when a Boer must bow to the will of a black Kafir!"

As he spoke, a man entered, bearing a big wooden bowl. Roast goat's flesh is not always a dainty, but I thought it was that night, and with some chuala to wash it down, I was well satisfied; and without bothering to hear what Long Piet might have to tell me, for I knew he had little information beyond what I was aware of, I threw myself on a clean straw mat, and slept as soundly as if I had been in my own home by the Dart.

When I awoke, a streak of sunlight was stealing in through the low doorway. I caught Long Piet's eye.

His face was pale and haggard, and from his appearance he did not seem to have slept at all.

"Hallo!" I said, "you do not look as if you have had a very good night's rest?"

"Is it likely," he answered, "when I heard them prowling about the kraal all night?"

"What if they were?" I said. "They did not intend any harm. The proof is that we are here safe now."

"Ja, you English are queer!" he retorted. "You sleep like logs when at any moment you might have your throats cut; we Boers are different, we think."

"I daresay you have good reason to. Perhaps if you were to think a little more at other times, and use the sjambok a good deal less, you might have had just as good a night's rest as I have had."

He made no reply but gazed sullenly before him. I crawled through the narrow opening, and stood in the sunlight outside. I had not been there half a minute before I was joined by my interpreter of the night before.

"Yas, Massa," he said; "de Massa must eat, den de big man Umbufan will speakee to de Massa."

"Is he up?" I asked.

"Up, Massa?" he said with a grin, "him up plenty much time; him Umbufan; him no muchee sleepee." He then yelled out something, and two boys immediately appeared bearing some wooden bowls. One contained a roast fowl; the other, the inevitable smashed mealies. A gourd of goat's milk made up the rest of the repast, and it is needless to say that Long Piet and I lost no time in making away with these dainties.

"Now, I am ready for Umbufan," I said to the man

and walked out of the hut, followed by Long Piet; but as the latter appeared, my guide told me that he must remain where he was. I thought this looked suspicious; the man no doubt guessed my thoughts.

"Him big man, Umbufan, will speakee Massa only, Sah," he said. "Him plenty good man, Umbufan."

There was nothing for it. Long Piet slunk back into the hut, and, preceded by the native, I crossed the enclosure in the direction of where I had entered it the night before. To my surprise, my guide walked straight through the opening which had gained us admission, then taking a turn to the left, proceeded in the direction of the river.

The stream I noticed was higher than ever, and the rainfall must have been very heavy up in the hills. When we had arrived within a couple of hundred yards of the bank, my guide dived into the bush, and, taking a small footpath, seemed to wind round to the back of the village. We went on this way for about a quarter of an hour, when, without warning of any close neighbours, I stepped into an almost square, open space. Towards the further end a single figure was standing, but at least a hundred men were squatting on their haunches, forming the ring that surrounded him. As I approached, the ring opened; my guide without a word fell back into the circle, and I stood confronting the man I had seen the night before—the chief, Umbufan. He clapped his hands, and the whole assembly stood up. They stood for a moment, then resumed their former position; but, in that brief space of time, I could not help noticing that their chief was at least

half a head taller than the biggest man there, and there were not wanting many who stood more than six feet.

"You are welcome, white man," he said; "for we know that your tongue is straight, and that you are not of the people of this land."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

He clapped his hands again; a man in the circle stood up. I looked at him—it was Charley!

"There are those who seek for you," continued the chief, "who are not your friends. They follow on your spoor. But the rain has been your friend, and they travel but slowly; but before the sun has set twice they will be here. There is one with you who knows much. That he may do you no harm, my people shall go with you to the Mozama river, but further can they not go, for the sun will then no longer shine on the land of Umbufan."

I was struck with astonishment to imagine why this man should have taken such an interest in my affairs, and wondered what news he could have become possessed of, but to all my inquiries I could get no further reply, except: "Go thy way, O white man! and let it be known amongst your brethren across the big water what Umbufan has done to one of the children of the great White Queen."

I looked round for Charley, but he had disappeared, and I never saw him again.

My guide now came forward, and led me back to the village. In less than half an hour I was astride old Blessbok. Long Piet walked by my side. I had arranged with him to ride in turns, and in this way, accompanied by ten men, we left the kraal of Umbufan,

Long Piet looking very much as if he were a prisoner, and I the mounted man of his guards.

I cannot say that we made very good progress, as I had to keep pace with him, and Boers are naturally bad pedestrians, never walking unless they are actually obliged to, as in the present case. However, by riding alternately, we accomplished our journey of thirteen miles towards four in the afternoon, and arrived on the banks of the Mozama river, which was nearly as swollen as the Tabanyana, and I now understood why Umbufan had sent his party.

We followed the bank of the stream down for about a hundred yards, and found a stout raft floating there. Our men, without the least ado, as if it had been an everyday occurrence, pushed it off, and we were soon sweeping down the stream with old Blessbok's halter on board, and him swimming behind. The river gave a sharp bend. Three men who had been poising a huge pole in the air, suddenly dug it into the stream, and, as if we had been navigated by the best steering-gear ever invented, we shot straight to a projecting piece of land. Two men leaped ashore with a stout hide rope, and a few moments later the whole of our party including old Blessbok, were beside them on the bank.

We were now joined by some other natives who had evidently seen the landing, and a great deal of talking, laughing and gesticulating went on between the two parties. At length some thirty men tackled on to the tow-rope, and slowly, very slowly, they tugged the raft up stream. For want of something better to do, I stood and watched them. Presently we saw them shoot out into

the river. They swept past us, then across to the opposite bank, and as they neared it, a clump of bush shut out their dusky forms from view; and though we caught the snatch of a song they were singing, it was the last we saw of them.

"Well! they are gone!" I said to my companion.

"Ja; I wish it was to the bottom of the river," he answered with a growl, "the black devils! and to think that I should have had to walk between them and my good horse gone, and my rifle. I have never walked so much in my life, and without shoes!"

"Well!" I said, "it's no good remaining here; we had better be getting on."

"On where?" he asked. "Why could we not have remained at the kraal?"

"You were anxious enough to get away from it last night," I replied. "But perhaps you were expecting some friends?"

He shot a quick glance at me as if to read my thoughts.

"Whom should I expect at the home of a Kafir dog?" he grumbled, and seeing that I had already mounted the bank, he followed, complaining at every step, and cursing every description of native, especially those who inhabited this part of the country. The men who had come down to the bank to meet our party, after helping them to tow the raft up stream had not returned. It seemed very strange to me, as I well knew the idle curiosity of most natives. Perhaps they had gone off for instructions from their "indunas," but, though I did not like the look of it, I did not let Long Piet see that I

had any anxiety. At last it occurred to him that it seemed strange conduct.

"Where is our way now?" I asked, "and where are we going?"

"That is more than I can tell you," was the answer.

"How so, Long Piet?" I said sharply. "I thought you were my guide?"

"Look here, Englishman," he said. "I have been in this part of the country many a time, but then I had friends, a good horse, and a good rifle; then these black devils were humble and meek. But they are quite different now; I do not like the look of them."

"Then what are we to do?" I asked. "We can't stay where we are."

"We must keep down the stream, and not pass through the village there," and he pointed towards the left. "I know of a man, about an hour from here, who used to be a servant on my father's farm. True, I have given him many a sjamboking—so has my father; but I think he will help us for all that. They are just like dogs; the more you beat them the better they like you."

"Lead on, then!" I replied, "let us get housed before it is dark," and taking old Blessbok by the bridle, the trees being too close to mount, I followed the unhappy Piet.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WITCH-DOCTOR

"NOW," said Long Piet, "if we have not been watched, this is the best place to remain until darkness sets in."

We had arrived on the outskirts of the wood, and an open piece of veldt lay before us. I tethered Blessbok, and we stretched ourselves down on the grass. We were well screened from observation, but nothing at the distance of a mile could pass in front of us without being seen.

We had been there for about an hour, and the sun was getting low when Long Piet asked me if I could see anything, at the same time with his finger directing my gaze to our right front. For a moment I could make out nothing; then a flash as of lightning appeared to glimmer on the horizon, but I knew that was impossible, for there was not the least sign of a storm. Now I could catch it continually.

"What does that mean?" I asked of my companion who had turned very pale.

"It means, Englishman, that the natives are up. That flashing you see is only the glint of their assegais and guns. There were many signs of this when we came

along. It is not the first time I have seen an impi on the march, and God help the white man who may cross their path!"

Soon a long dark line appeared; a deep, sullen roar accompanied it. In less than half an hour the dark forms of a host of men were quite visible. They headed across the veldt to within half a mile from us, and as they swept rapidly on, shouting their war-songs and shaking their assegais in the evening sunlight, they presented a spectacle not easily to be forgotten. Judging from the length of their line, they must have been from fifteen hundred to two thousand strong, and knowing as Long Piet did, that they were his deadliest enemies, it is no small wonder he turned pale.

"I will warrant that old she-devil of the Majaja is at the bottom of this," he said. "If Magato's people and those in the Klein Letaba are in it, there will be some heavy work for General Joubert. I hate the black devils, and it is right that we do not allow them in our kirks at Nachtmaal!"

I knew this to be a fact—that one portion of this highly Christian community did not allow natives inside their places of worship.

"Yet," I said, "you are going to seek shelter from a black man now!"

"Bah!" was the reply. "Does not a dog protect his master?"

All sounds of the passing host had died away, and twilight was upon us.

"Look there!" said Long Piet, pointing in the direction from whence the armed party had come. "Do

you see that tall tree? It is close to the foot of it that old Babijan lives. He is looked upon as a 'muti' man, and does not live with the rest of his people. It is a good thing for us, as none will dare enter his kraal without his leave. It will be quite dark in half an hour. Keep your eyes on the spot, and watch the star that covers it. It will not do to take the wrong road and lose our way to-night."

We crept cautiously out, satisfied ourselves that there was not a single living object near, and mounting Long Piet on the horse, I took the bridle in my hand, and walked rapidly in the direction the star guided me.

When once we had fairly got away from the vicinity of the wood and were on the open veldt, the darkness did not appear so dense, and I found no difficulty without the aid of the star in making for the tall tree. We had arrived within, as far as I could judge in the darkness, a couple of hundred yards of it, when Long Piet dismounted.

"You must remain here," he said; "but give me your rifle." His conduct during the day had not been so particularly friendly that it might induce me to deliver up my weapon, so, very quietly, but firmly, I gave him to understand that I had no intention of doing so.

"If you are going to a friend," I said, "you will require no arms; and if, as you say, no one comes near his kraal without his leave, there is no danger."

He grumbled out something, the purport of which I did not catch, and left me. Suddenly I was startled by a strange shrill cry, then a low piping sound. As I kept

peering into the darkness, a light flashed; again I heard the same sound, and then my sharp ear detected whispering at no great distance from me. This went on for about ten minutes, though they seemed like hours to me. At last I could make out the dim outline of a tall figure, and Long Piet joined me.

"He is here," he said, "and will give us shelter; but you must be quick, for he expects a visit from two indunas when the moon is risen. They come to consult him about the rising. The black devils are in earnest this time, and I wish I were well out of it."

"But what am I to do with the horse?" I asked.

"I have arranged all that," he answered; "but be quick, there is no time to lose," and catching the horse by the bridle he led him quickly away.

As I walked along by the horse's side, I had an idea that some one else was walking on the other side, but we had now got beneath the tree, and it was too dark to see. It could not have been Long Piet, as he was just ahead. Presently he turned towards me.

"Now, Englishman," he said, "to your left."

"But the horse?" I replied.

"He is safe," came the answer; "quick!"

For the first time since I had met him, I followed his advice, feeling that fear for his own safety prompted him to act as he was doing. He walked quickly for about fifty paces, then stooping down, entered the usual round Kafir kraal. Catching a burning brand from the fire within, to my surprise he dragged aside a rough mat that was suspended from the top of the hut and formed a kind of curtain at the back of it. Here was another

surprise. It covered what looked like a black hole; in other words, it was the entrance to a cave. The hut, having been built round the mouth, formed the means of entrance.

"Now, come on, Englishman," he said, "or if you are frightened, I will go first." But I did not give him the chance, and passed in, he following, and the curtain dropped behind us.

This curtain, I discovered, was formed of grass rudely plaited together. To any person sitting in the hut it would be impossible to tell what was hidden behind it, but to those in the cave, it would not be difficult to follow the action and hear every word of the occupants of the kraal.

It was so utterly pitch dark at our backs that it was quite impossible to see how far the cave extended, or whether or not there might have been some awful abyss to fall into. Not relishing this, I sat down about three feet from the entrance; Long Piet sat just behind me. We had not been in this position many minutes, when I heard some one creep into the kraal. I still held my rifle in my hand. It being loaded, I put it between my knees, and pointed it direct for the opening. Long Piet must have noticed what I was doing, for he grasped my arm and whispered:

"It is old Babijan, Englishman; mind what you are doing!" A thin, skinny arm was thrust in—it almost touched my face; then the words, very softly uttered in Dutch, "They are here!" and the hand disappeared. Scarcely a moment later I became aware that two new figures had entered the hut.

The old man, Babijan, had taken his seat on a log within two feet of our entrance, so as more to cover it I presume, and had his back towards us. He was muttering and mumbling some kind of gibberish, and as he did so, kept on casting twigs on the smouldering fire. Presently little flames began to shoot up, and by their weird light, crouching just before it, with their faces turned in my direction, were two of the most fantastic, I might say horrible, forms I have ever seen. They had come in so quietly, without uttering a single word, that I almost wondered how they had got there. Between them on the floor lay a human head, not a skull, but the *bonâ fide* head of a man, that appeared to have been very recently in possession of a body. The three pairs of eyes seemed to be watching the old man, for those of the dead man were still open.

I had now leisure to scrutinise the two newcomers more closely. Both were men of great stature; even from their sitting posture it was easy to judge that. On their heads they wore a skin which, in the flicker of the light, appeared to be red. I could not tell what animal had been its possessor, it might have been a small jackal, and the bushy tails hung down behind. Over the massive shoulders of one was a leopard skin, revealing his huge throat and sinewy arms, and a small skin of the same animal hung round his loins; for the rest, he had all that Nature had given him, nothing more.

The other man was more profusely decorated. Apart from his head-gear, he too wore a skin, but not a leopard's, though he was considerably decked out with feathers sticking through the lobes of his ears, and had

also ruffles of some skin hung round his legs just below the knees. They both carried three assegais, which they kept in their hands, with the tips pointed towards the roof.

At last the old man, as if waking from a sleep, said:

"What would you with me? and what present have you brought me?" and he pointed with a small wand to the head.

"He was within the precincts of the sacred tree, and lied to us that you had white men here. Did we do right to bring him thus, O thou caller of the rain?" said one of them.

"Truly hath the Tagati sent thee my way this night, and thou hast done well to bring him here," said the old man. "But why do you come, and what would you know? for I see you would learn the words of the bones. You need not tell me; I have spoken!" As old Babijan had told Long Piet he quite expected the visit, and they would only come to consult his witchery, this was obvious, but his answer seemed to affirm his power in the minds of his visitors, and, as if to express their wonder at his divining their thoughts, both uttered the Kafir ejaculation of astonishment—"Ow!"

Taking his wand, the old man described a circle on the mud floor immediately in front of the fire, and between himself and the two men. He now seized the head, and held the still dripping, bloody trophy above the circle. Satisfied that the ground was well saturated with the gore, he carelessly threw the head back towards the men, and produced a straw bag which he had by his

side. From this he drew out three bones: one the thigh-bone, another the arm, and lastly, the skeleton foot of some human being. These he took up in his hands, and held above his head. After uttering some gibberish, he let them fall into the circle, and then sat silent for some moments. The utmost concern and anxiety was now apparent on the dusky visages of his audience, and in their excitement they both stood up.

"Would you stand when the spell is working?" asked old Babijan, sternly; and as if they had been little schoolboys cowering beneath the scowl of their displeased usher, these gigantic, bloodthirsty savages sank down on their haunches, and remained in this attitude during the rest of the *séance*. The old man took up the bones again, shook them up in the bag, and allowed them to fall into the circle as before. He studied them for a minute, then speaking in a subdued tone as if frightened to hear his own voice, he thus addressed them:

"O thou, the Prowling Leopard! and thou, the Wildebeeste! sons of the Mozama, children of the forest, the hill, and the veldt, Chaka, the Great Father of thy people speaks, and thus he saith:

"'Babijan! thou my chosen mouthpiece, thou to whom I tell my wishes, thou who hast the power of the evil eye, who makest the rain to fall, the grass to grow, speak to my children, that, listening, they may hear my voice through thine!'" Here the two savages looked at each other, and rolled their eyes as if in the deepest awe, as indeed they were, of the arrant old humbug who was addressing them. For a moment he had stopped

speaking, probably to collect his ideas, but it seemed all the more impressive. At last he went on in the same low voice:

"Great is the affliction that has fallen on my people; many are the hardships they endure. Their lands were once broad and fair, they hunted the buffalo and the water-pig, and sat in the shade of their kraals whilst their women worked. But why is this not so now? Why do they wander from their native land? Why do others return to their kraals with the print of the hide of the water-pig on their backs? Why do my children all these things? Is it that their hearts are like that of the doe, that they dare not face the men with the white faces, the men of sheep and oxen, who spurn them with their feet, who beat them with the hide of the water-pig, who steal their lands and cattle, and take their women and children away that they may work and toil? Thus, O Babijan! shalt thou speak to my people. To thee, who alone can reach my ear, shall they give their answer, that Chaka, their father, may yet know what are the doings of his children. Oh! speak thus to them, Babijan! the tongue of my life! the eye of my heart! that they may speak to you!'" After this long-winded rigmarole, which cleverly shifted all ideas off his own shoulders, he remained silent.

The two men looked at each other for some time, neither seeming inclined to speak first. They had come to get information from their "witch-doctor"; instead of that, it was left to them to take whatever steps they thought the initiative required. It was clear to me, if not to the two indunas, that whatever

happened, Babijan could not be in the wrong. If their project failed, he would be sure to tell them that Chaka had not approved of it; and if on the other hand it proved successful, he would take all the *kudos* to himself.

At last, he who had been called the Prowling Leopard addressed old Babijan.

"Cannot our great father, Chaka, tell us how to act?" he said in a subdued voice.

"I am but the mouth-piece," replied the witch-doctor; "you have heard his wishes." The two men looked at each other, then whispered together.

"We will come back to-morrow by the same time of the moon," said Wildebeeste; "we would now go and speak with our people."

"Listen!" said Babijan, addressing them, "You can go to your people and tell them the words of their great father, Chaka, but you cannot return until three suns have risen and set, for I will speak with him; and during that time thou shalt kill neither man, woman, or child, either white or black, ox or goat, but will live on the fowls of the air, the fish of the river, and the meal that thy great father ate before thee! When the sun shall have risen and set three times, then shalt thou kill two fat beasts, drink much chuala, and speak to Chaka, thy father!" With these words he waved his wand, and pointed to the door.

Prowling Leopard stooped, picked up the head, and followed by his companion, passed out.

CHAPTER XXVI

BABIJAN AND HIS BAASIE

FOR some time after the departure of the two indunas, the old man sat in the same place. At last he got up and walked softly towards the door, then stooping down, till he almost appeared to be on his hands and knees, he crawled out. He was away for about ten minutes, at the end of which time he reappeared. Dropping a mat across the doorway, he came to the middle of the hut, and after executing a sort of fandango, snapping his fingers and wagging his head horribly, burst out into a hoarse laugh.

"Come in! come in! my master—son of my old Baas, that I knew when but a little child—come in! the fools have gone! Ah! old Babijan knows how to deal with them! I am to have ten good fat oxen—ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he! But come in, I say, for my eyes are gladdened to see you, and we will eat and drink, and talk of the old Baas, and the place where Babijan worked so long."

With these words he pulled our curtain aside, and nothing loath to get out of the dark hole where we had been confined so long, I stepped into the kraal, followed by Long Piet. The old man hardly appeared to notice me, but ran to the Boer, and threw himself at his feet.

"Ah! my klein Baas!" he said, "my heart is glad to see you; but Allermenser! you must eat—my little master must eat." It was strange to hear the old man pouring out his devotion to one who, in all probability, had given him nothing but hard words and harder blows. But all this was forgotten; he only remembered the little boy he used to carry about, walk with, and ride with, and Babijan the mighty witch-doctor and rain-maker for the time did not exist—but the old dog-like faithful servant did. The flowery language too had been laid aside, and he spoke in Cape Dutch. Even Long Piet seemed a little moved by this show of loyalty, but he expressed it in the rude, uncouth manner of his race.

"Ja, ja, Babijan, that will do," he said. "You spoke about eating—I am hungry; get the food and be quick!"

"Ja, my klein Baas," said the old man, rising from the ground, "Babijan will be quick for the young master, and he shall have of the best," and he dashed out of the hut, only to return in a few seconds with a square bottle of gin and a tin pannikin.

"Ja, Baasie, ja," he said, as he handed him the bottle, "Babijan has got good things in his kraal; for since he has been rain-maker he is rich, and no traders ever pass through the country without giving Babijan a present. But drink, Baasie, drink, and the koss will soon be ready. Babijan has not forgotten how to cook, for was it not your mother that taught me?" and he darted out again.

Long Piet poured out about half a pannikin of the spirit, smelt it, tasted it, and finally drank it off; then after the civil manner of his countrymen, when he had

thoroughly satisfied himself, passed me the bottle and pannikin. I took a small quantity, as the dampness of the cave and lightness of my attire had somewhat chilled me.

Shortly after this the old man returned, and we had no reason to complain of the very substantial meal he gave us, waiting on us in the humble, obsequious manner he must have learnt when a servant in the employ of the old tyrant, Long Piet's father. He now produced some very good tobacco and two wooden pipes, and after asking permission from Long Piet to smoke, too, lit his long pipe, and began to unfold his plan for our safety, or I should rather say Piet's, as he did not appear to consider me at all.

"Baasie," said the old man, addressing Long Piet, "things are very bad in this country now. Though my eyes are glad to see you, yet sorry I am you are here. There is much trouble; the people suffer much, and they cry for blood. The people from Pretoria, who have not lived the length of the life of a man in this country, say that the children of this land, whose fathers go back to the time when the biggest tree in the forest was not yet planted, must pay them hut tax. They say we may no longer kill the wild-pig that lives in our rivers; our people say it is that they may have more to make their sjamboks to beat them with. The farmers, when the cool season comes on, come down here and hunt. They kill the game, they take our goats, mealies, pumpkins, milk; they do it with a heavy hand, and never do they pay. The English traders pay for all they get, and the people like to see them in the country. Again, worse

things have happened. More than once, not content with taking our goods, the people of your race take away our young boys, women, and children, to work for them on their farms. You know what I say is true; for was I not one who, when but a lad of ten, was taken from my home by the groote Baas your father? He promised me pay—six oxen and ten sheep after ten years' work. Did I get what he promised me? You know, Baasie; you know what I got."

During the whole of his meal, and after it, Long Piet had been sedulously applying himself to the gin-bottle, and his Dutch courage overcoming his discretion, he turned sharply to the old man, and said:

"Well! what about all this? What are these black devils made for? Do they want us to work for them, and pay their taxes, and find them food? You would not have spoken like this when you were in my father's house, Babijan."

"No," said the old man, flashing up at the taunt, and at the memory of what he had undergone at the hands of his merciless masters, "no, I should not; for the sjambok, as it has done a hundred times, would have cut into my flesh; but Babijan the servant, the herd, the slave, exists no more, and at one word from Babijan the witch-doctor, ten thousand men will do his bidding!"

Long Piet turned pale; he had not bargained for such an answer from the cringing old servant of former days. The witch-doctor looked at him for a moment, and his fierce, ugly features softened.

"Come, Baasie," he said, "the old man did not mean to speak angrily, for did you not steal me tobacco from

the old Baas when you were a boy? Many's the time you have ridden before me on the old sheep-skin saddle. Old Babijan remembers this, and now his time has come to serve you."

Long Piet did not offer any reply, but sat sullenly smoking his pipe and taking deep draughts out of the bottle. Probably knowing his late master much better than I did, Babijan rose.

"I will get your sleeping-place ready," he said, "but it cannot be here."

He returned in a few minutes with a magnificent silver jackal kaross.

"Come, my child," he said, laying his hand lightly on the arm of the big Boer, "come, and your old Babijan will show you your bed, as he has done many a time before."

The ill-tempered fellow rose, and, without even saying "Good-night" to me, preceded by the old man, passed through the curtain into the cave.

For quite an hour I smoked on quietly at my pipe; then, as there was no sign of the reappearance of the old man, I grew impatient. I deliberated whether I should try and follow them through the dark labyrinths of the cave, or go out and see how old Blessbok was faring. There could be no danger, as old Babijan had said no one was to come near him for three days; so I stepped out into the moonlight, and walked towards the shadow of the tall tree near which I had parted with my beast. I got beneath it, and was walking quietly along, when I stumbled and fell over the body of a man. Expecting treachery, I grappled hold of it, but

I might have saved myself the trouble, for I discovered that it was but a headless trunk, undoubtedly belonging to the head produced by the indunas. It was still warm, and, with a feeling of horror, I was about to rise, when I heard low voices at some fifty paces from me. I crouched down by the corpse, and lay almost as still as it. The speakers, though whispering, appeared to be excited; they forgot their caution, and spoke in undertones.

"No, Baasie!" said a voice I recognised to be that of the old man, "it is your only chance, and you must go at once."

"You old fool!" replied Long Piet, for his companion was none other, "do you mean to tell me that they would dare?"

"Dare!" came the reply; "I tell you, Baasie, now that their blood is up, they will dare anything."

"But the Englishman!" said Long Piet, "how am I to manage about him? Suppose he were to come back before he is wanted—though I have arranged pretty well about that; but suppose he were to get through and spoil all our plans? Why, I should not get my hundred pounds from Hans!"

"Never mind him," retorted the old man; "if you do not want him back, he need not come at all."

"Ah! you always were a good friend," said Piet, "but Hans did not say that, for when it is all over, I think he wants him; but of course if it comes to the worst, you will know what to do."

"Ja, ja, Baasie; but now you must go. If you cannot cross the river, remain in all day. Katana will cook for

you, and bring me news of what you are doing. She is very quick, and no one will dare to question the granddaughter of Babijan the rain-maker."

They walked away, and lying still where I was, three or four minutes later I heard a horse ambling quietly off.

I rose cautiously to my feet, and peered out across the veldt. The bright moon shone almost like day, and I had just time to catch a glimpse of Long Piet and my old Blessbok before they disappeared from sight behind some rising ground.

I had left my rifle in the kraal. "Fool that I am!" I thought to myself, "had I but had it with me!" But, on calmer reflection, a minute later, I thought it was as well I had not, for what good would it have availed me had I shot Long Piet or the old man? There were thousands in the country to avenge the latter, and he certainly would have done the same to any one who might harm the man he had loved and served so faithfully.

With these reflections I walked quietly back to the kraal, sat down in the place I had occupied, and a few minutes later Babijan re-entered the kraal from the cave.

"Where is Long Piet?" I asked.

"The Baasie sleeps," he said. "And now, Baas, if you too would sleep, I will show you where to go."

Nothing loth, and knowing that for the time at least I was safe and could do nothing else, I assented. Diving once more through the curtain, he told me to wait until he called me, as he was going to make things ready. Presently I heard his voice; it sounded weird and

sepulchral, and pushing the curtain aside, I saw a light at some distance from me and made for it. When I had gone about fifty paces he called out:

"Wait, Baas, where you are; I will come for you with the light."

For a minute it disappeared, and then reappeared coming from the right. As he got up to me he turned the torch to my front, and said:

"Look there, Baas!"

I did, and within ten paces of where I stood, in a direct line where I had first seen him standing with the light, yawned an awful chasm, at least twenty-five feet in width. Holding his light above it, he pointed into it. I peered down, and tried in vain to fathom the bottom, but it was lost in inky darkness.

The old man looked at me, and then without a word turned. I followed him, and about a hundred paces to our right from where we stood, after traversing a narrow passage, we again came to the chasm. It was not so broad, and was spanned by a rough-hewn, thick plank; there was no hand-rail. The old man crossed without looking down, and, keeping my eyes fixed on his light, I followed, and felt relieved when my foot touched the rock on the opposite side. Another twenty paces, and the torch showed me an aperture, a small room, apparently hewn out of the solid rock. It was clean and airy; a bundle of rugs and skins lay on the ground.

"There is your room, Baas," said the old man. "You are not the first who has slept there." So saying, and as if by magic, he disappeared, and I was left in complete darkness.

I must then have slept for hours, for when I awoke I felt hungry, and that could hardly be in a short time after the hearty meal old Babijan had provided us with. Whether it was night or day I was quite at a loss to know, as the most intense darkness prevailed on all sides. There is nothing like smoking for deep reflection, so I decided to have a pipe; but, alas! I had not the match or wherewithal to light it, so was fain to put on my thinking cap without the comfort and aid of the aromatic weed.

As I got more and more hungry, my thoughts in like manner became more and more uncomfortable. Could it be possible that I was destined to be starved to death in this horrible dark hole? No! I did not think that. But what could be keeping the old man? An idea occurred to me. I still had my rifle and cartridges. My apartment was not fitted with the convenience of an electric bell; why not try a shot? That would answer the purpose and light my pipe at the same time. I gathered some loose, dry grass together, that had formed the mattress of my bed, extracted the bullet from the cartridge, slipped the latter into my rifle, and placing the muzzle within a couple of inches of the dry grass, fired. The report in that confined place sounded like that of a cannon, and I heard it echo and re-echo through the cavern, and gradually rumble away in the far distance. At any rate, it had served two purposes—lit the grass and told me that the bounds of my habitation were enormous.

By the smouldering grass I managed to light my pipe, but no one came. I began to calculate how long one

could live on smoking. I had often heard wonderful tales about the sustaining power there is in a pipe of tobacco; in fact, I had proved its utility on more than one occasion. Then my thoughts took a more practical turn—of how to get out of my present position. I remembered the plank I had crossed to get there. I would cautiously crawl on my hands and knees until I got to the brink of the chasm, and see if the plank still remained. There could be no danger, and without a moment's hesitation, this time not going without my rifle, I dropped on my hands and knees, and proceeded to put my plan into practical shape.

CHAPTER XXVII

LONG PIET MAKES CONFESSION

THE brink of the chasm was not far from my sleeping-place, and I soon found the plank. I felt it with my hands; it seemed steady enough. I was about to cross it straddle-legged, when a peculiar, creepy, crawly, gliding sound appeared to come from the sides or bottom of the hole and arrested my attention. What could it be? Every now and then I could hear a kind of hiss, and once or twice, it might have been my imagination, I thought I saw two small specks glittering through the intense darkness. A kind of loathsome dread came over me, and I remained gazing down as if fascinated by what lay below. How long I had been in that position I do not know, but I was startled by a voice close beside me.

"Why does the master look down into the snake pit? Had he tried to cross the plank, he would have been down with them now; before you reached the other side it would drop, for it rests but lightly on that edge."

It was Babijan who spoke, and I shuddered when I thought of the fate that might have befallen me. Better to die of starvation than to fall through that inky dark-

ness into a pit of serpents. I have been through many dangers, but that would be the last one I should choose to face.

"Do you want to starve me, that you keep me so long without food?" I asked.

"Nay, Baas," said the old man, "I had much to do, and could not come; but there is plenty for you in your sleeping-room now, and what is more, I have brought you some light. They are good candles, for the English trader gave Babijan a box when he was last here. Come," he continued, taking me by the arm, "it is not good to be kept from the light of the sun, but at present it is covered with blood, and the Baas must be patient and remain here."

I accompanied him and found another ample meal awaiting me. The promised candle was also there, stuck in an empty gin-bottle.

"How long is this to last?" I asked, somewhat impatiently.

"That I cannot say; it may be only a day, or it may be many," was the reply.

I did not want to show the white feather, but I did not like the idea of having snakey companions so near to my sleeping-place. By daylight I should never fear them, but in the dark it was another matter.

"Can those snakes get out?" I asked.

"Nothing ever gets out of that pit when once it gets in," was the answer, "either snakes or men—and there are many of both that have gone into it."

"But I am certain I saw the eyes of one within ten feet of me," I said.

"Ja, ja," was the reply, "that was old Japie, but it was further off than that; he does get up within a short distance of the top sometimes, but he cannot get out. It is a good thing, too, for even now he does not know me, though I have given him many a good meal for more than a hundred moons. There is tobacco, Baas, and there is gin. And now I must go; but do not try and cross the plank, if you would not meet old Japie." And with these consoling words he disappeared as quietly as he had come.

More eating, more smoking, more sleeping, and except for the dim light of a candle, nothing to see but the confines of my little room. It was intolerable, but for all that had to be endured. But, hark! what was that? Was I awake or dreaming? I started up, there was no doubt about my being awake. Loud angry voices were ringing through the cavern.

"Thou did'st lie! Babijan; thou did'st lie when thou said'st there were no white men here. Did I not slay my brother when he said thou had'st them with thee? Yet he spoke with a straight tongue; and false rain-maker that thou art, surely thou shalt die!"

"Nay, Prowling Leopard! and thou, O Wildebeeste! listen to Babijan, the rain-maker; listen to his words, for they are the words of Chaka! The white man thou seekest is not here."

I got out of my room, and standing at the entrance, could hear every word most distinctly.

"It is not the voice of Chaka, it is but the whine of Babijan, the false rain-maker," roared Prowling Leopard, "for did not thy daughter, Katana, whom I found near

the river, say that the long man whom we seek is here? But if Chaka can help thee, call upon him to stay the assegai that I now will plunge in thy false breast."

"Beware how thou enterest the haunts of Chaka!" said Babijan, and I heard a fleet footstep running towards me. In an instant it had crossed the plank, and before I could realise what would happen next, Babijan had blown out the light in my room. He seized my arm and drew me down towards him.

"Do not say a word, but follow me," he said; "your life may depend on it, and another's life is depending on you."

He took my arm, and we glided quietly out of the room. Turning to the left, we followed down a long passage; then a sharp turn to the right, and he told me to lie down. In the meantime I could hear that the two men had been joined by some others. They were all in a very excited state and shouting for vengeance.

"He calls himself the rain-maker, and the voice of Chaka!" roared Prowling Leopard, "and yet he runs like the deer from us! But he shall die! and this hand shall slay him!"

"And this, too! and this, too!" they all roared together. "And the long white man, he, too, shall die!"

I could tell we were actually in the same passage as our enemies. What could have possessed Babijan to bring me there, and where was he?

At that moment a sudden ray of light shot from an aperture beside me, and a deep voice said:

"Beware how thou visitest, uninvited, the haunts of Chaka!" then the light went out.

A cry of derision and scorn went up from the other

end of the passage. There was a rush towards the exact place where I was lying, then a shriek, followed by another, and another, and several more—and then all was still.

"Ja," said a voice close beside me, "old Japie and his friends will have a good meal now!" and holding a torch above his head, he walked forward. "Look there, Baas," he said.

I did. There stood the yawning abyss that had lain before them—and thus they met their doom.

I was struck with horror at this wholesale murder.

"You have killed them!" I said, turning to Babijan.

"Killed them? Why, of course I have!" was the cool reply. "Is it not better than that they should have killed me, and you, too? for nothing could have saved you. But come, Baas; I am in a hurry, a great hurry, and was coming for you when these men stopped me. My Baasie, my klein Baasie!" he said with great emotion, "is ill, very ill. I fear it is the fever of the Low Country, for he wanders in his mind, and speaks of strange things, always calling for you, that he must speak with you; or, do you think," he said, almost savagely, "that I would have left him?"

"But you were here an hour ago!" I said; "have you seen him since?"

"An hour!" he replied, with a laugh. "Englishman, it is more than half a day since I was with you; the sun was but risen when I was here, and now it will hide its face again. But come, there is no time to talk; follow me."

Holding the torch high above his head, he turned,

passed through the aperture from which he had shown the light, and after a walk of what seemed quite a quarter of a mile, I felt a cool breeze blowing in upon me, and almost before I could realise it, was standing in the midst of a dense bush, with the clear atmosphere sparkling with innumerable stars above me, for it was even later than the old man had supposed. I need hardly say what a great sigh of relief burst from me when I once more found myself a free man; but I had not much time in which to reflect. The old man had left me for a minute only, when, returning, he said sharply:

"Come, mount! Here is the old horse; follow me!" and he darted off with a rapidity that appeared incredible in one of his years. I swung myself into the saddle, Blessbok seemed to know that his master was once more astride of him, and we followed at a quick walk or tripple, which had to be changed into a canter, so rapidly did Babijan hurry forward.

"Where goes Babijan with the white man?" said a deep voice.

There was no answer except a half-smothered groan, a cry, and the sound of a heavy body falling to the ground.

"Come, come, Englishman," said the voice of Babijan, "there is no time to waste;" then in a low voice to himself, I caught the words, "So must all perish who stand between old Babijan and his klein Baasie!"

We had now been travelling for about half-an-hour, and had arrived on the banks of the river. Turning

down stream the old man hurried on, never faltering in his path. At last he stopped.

"You must dismount here," he said, "but lose no time."

I was out of the saddle in an instant, and by his side. He seized my arm and led me through some long rushes that here fringed the bank of the river.

"Now, Baas," he said, "step in, and keep steady."

In the darkness to which my eyes had now become accustomed, I could make out the outline of a small canoe. The old man was already seated in the middle, with a paddle in his hand. I stepped into the stern, and we pushed out through the rushes. A moment later we were gliding down the river. We had not gone a hundred lengths before he turned the head of the craft in-shore. We shot through the rushes as if going right into the bank; suddenly we were in pitch darkness. Babijan gave a whistle; immediately after a light showed, and I discovered that we were again in a cave, entered from the river.

"Now," said the old man, leaping out. I followed him, and within fifty paces of our landing-place, on a bundle of skins, karosses, and dried grass, the light of the up-held torch showed me the large outlines and figure of Long Piet.

A glance told me that he was under a very severe attack of malarial fever. Quinine was a medicine I never travelled without, nor should any man whose path might lead him through the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg districts of the Transvaal. I had some when I left the Woodbush village.

"I have medicine in my saddle-bag," I said, turning to Babijan, "and I can do nothing without it."

"Go and bring the saddle of the Baas here," he said.

"I am going," replied a soft voice, and for the first time I became aware that the torch-holder was none other than a young Kafir girl, who glided away towards the entrance of the cave. I heard the stroke of a paddle, and almost before I could realise she had gone the girl was back again, bearing the saddle on her shoulders.

To my relief I found the quinine, and without further delay gave the patient a good dose. But few people in England know what quinine is; they fiddle and play with it, it is true, but throw up their hands in amazement when you talk about taking five to six grains! I gave Long Piet fifteen, and then sat down to watch the result. For some time he went on with his rambling. I often heard myself spoken of; then it would be Hans; then Kato—the big girl he had danced with. At one time he was under the impression that he was flogging a native, none other than old Babijan, who was kneeling so faithfully beside him. Gradually the perspiration broke out through his skin, his ramblings ceased, he sank into a deep sleep, and I knew that for the time I had conquered the deadly fever.

"Ja, my Baas," said the witch-doctor, as he gave a sigh of relief, "the Englishman's medicine is good. It is better than any old Babijan has to give, but it would not do to tell them that," and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the village, "or there would be no more oxen, cows, and goats for Babijan. And to think that

he thought he was a boy once more, and flogging old Babijan! Ja, Baas, ja! those were splendid days, and if they would but come back, the Baasie could flog me from sunrise to sunset if he liked."

For the next three or four days Long Piet lay on the very brink of the grave, and though the actual fever had left him, his mind still wandered. At last he appeared to give signs of returning reason. Almost the first words he uttered when he regained the use of his faculties were: "Where is the Englishman?"

"I am here," I said quietly.

"I am glad, very glad," he replied; "give me your hand, friend, for I have much to tell you before I go on my long journey." This was indeed a strange speech for Long Piet, but putting my hand in his, I said cheerily:

"Nonsense, man! you will soon be on your journey with me to Magato's! Don't give way to such melancholy ideas. It is the fever that has made you so low-spirited."

"Nay, Englishman; what I am telling you is the truth," came the faint answer. "I know that I am coming to the end of my trek in this land; but I wish to make my load lighter before I take the journey, and if I part from you as my friend, it will help to grease the wheels, freshen the oxen, and smooth the path of this broken-down waggon," pointing with his finger to his breast as he said the last words. I saw it was best to humour him, so let him go on.

"Englishman!" he said, "I have been lying to you, cheating you, and leading you from the path where you

should find your friend—the girl you are seeking—leading you, perhaps to your own death!"

I was about to interrupt him, by telling him I knew all this, but he waved his hand.

"Do not speak, but listen to me further, for the worst has to come yet." He seemed for a moment to collect his thoughts, and then went on. "Even now, there might have been time for you to get back the way you came, and stop the marriage of the girl to Landrost du Toit; but the road by which you travelled is barred; you cannot go that way."

"Why not?" I asked, interrupting him; "these natives would not hurt me. You have seen how I have been treated by them since I left the Woodbush village?"

"I have seen and wondered," was the reply, "but they could not help you."

"Could not help me?" I said in some astonishment.

"No, they could not help you, for you have your greatest enemies on your trek—the Transvaal police, with Lieutenant Grobelaar, who hates you, at their head."

"The police?" I asked. "What for?"

"For a few moments he remained silent, then said in a weak voice: "They seek you for murder, and I am your accuser!" then quite exhausted with the strain just put upon him, he sank down, and for a second I really thought his last moment had come.

"Murder!" I thought. "What could he mean?"

Presently his fingers, which still clasped my hand, tightened. "Water!" he said in a faint voice.

Babijan who had sat quietly taking in every word,

gave him some, when Long Piet went on with his confession.

"Ja, Englishman, ja; they would arrest you for murder, and I am the cause of it."

"But how could that be? What murder could you accuse me of?"

"Englishman," said the sick man, "I hated you when you spoke to me about my treatment of the Bushman, when he was killed by lightning; and later, when you would not go with me, to the house of my friend, but preferred to go and seek shelter with the people of the old woman of the Majaja. Hans told me to take care of you, not to lose sight of you, but if things went badly, I knew what to do. The night I was away from you—the night you stayed at the Majaja kraal—I sent a letter to the Woodbush village, to the police lieutenant, telling him that you had murdered the Bushman, and had buried him under some stones. It would have mattered little had one of my people really killed a black, but you are an Englishman, and the policeman hates you; so did I then, and wanted to get back to my Kato. Even now the police would have had you, had it not been for the rifle the old woman sent you, and the disturbance in the country that has not allowed them to follow you. Englishman, I tell you, I have been bad, bad! You saved me from the water; it is your skill that is keeping me alive now; but it will not be for long; I know it—I feel it. Will you say the word? Call me friend! Say that you forgive me, and I shall pass hence feeling that, if you can do so, I may hope for forgiveness elsewhere."

He ceased speaking. Over what followed I will draw

a veil, except that he gave me further information in reference to Van der Merwe, stating that Hans had been the leader in the attack on my waggon when January was killed, and the instigator of the second attack. It was by him he had been urged to try and put me under the influence of a strong narcotic, so as to possess himself of all my documents. The plan failing, had led them to adopt the course they had pursued.

He also stated there was another Englishman, who professed to have the same name as myself, who was in some way in league with Hans about the girl; but neither Hans, nor Landrost du Toit ever told him much of their private affairs. All he knew was, that whatever part he took in their plans, he was, and had been, well paid, as had also one or two others; but beyond this, they, like himself, knew nothing.

To my question as to why I had been directed to keep to the right when crossing the drift, his reply was, that, had I done so, my waggon would certainly have been capsized, if not entirely lost.

As far as he knew, Van der Merwe had been aware of my movements immediately I had arrived in Middelburg. His main object had been to frustrate my journey to the Woodbush village, in the direction I was going, to compel me to go back to Middelburg, and make a fresh start from that place, by a long, circuitous route through Pretoria, Makapans-poorte, and Pietersburg. In the meantime, the girl would be smuggled into Middelburg, and whilst I was continually being put on the wrong scent at the Woodbush village, the

marriage would take place, and before I had an opportunity of returning. My objection to their advice, and the position I had taken up, had caused the change of plan.

Suffice it to say, that Long Piet and I were friends from that moment.

That night the girl Katana came hurrying into the cave. She seemed very excited, and immediately took her old grandsire on one side. Without saying a single word, the old man ran towards the little canoe, and I heard the small craft parting the high rushes, and the stroke of his paddle, as it cleft the water.

I looked across at the girl, who had taken her usual place near the foot of the sick man's pallet, as if asking for some explanation; but she avoided my eye, and it was evident did not want to be interrogated, so I left her alone. Long Piet was sleeping, and, overcome by a series of weary watches, I, too, began to doze. Was I awake or asleep? Something struck me I had heard that voice before. I sat up.

"S'elp me, if this 'ere ain't a queer 'ole! I've been in a few rum 'uns, but this beats 'em all. Well, mister, 'oo'd 'a thought of a-coming across you again? This is a funny go, ain't it?"

It was none other than Solomon Isaacs, the Jew I had met shortly after leaving the Woodbush village; and, close behind him, I could just distinguish the swarthy features of his Portuguese companion, who, on noticing that I had seen him, took off his hat, and made me a sweeping bow.

"But, mister," went on Solomon, "what's this old

Baby Jane tells me about 'aving a sick feller 'ere? 'Oo's 'e, and let's 'ave a look at 'im?"

I put my finger on my lips, and pointed to the sleeping man, who, in spite of the unusual noise, had not awakened. At that moment Long Piet turned his face.

"S'elp me," said Solomon, "if it ain't that 'ere Long Piet! And 'eres that 'ere old Baby Jane been a-telling me as 'ow 'is little master is ailing. Well, well, this 'ere is a rum go! I wish I 'ad to doctor any other than one of that 'ere gang," he continued, turning to me; "but when a feller's down on 'is luck, Solomon Isaacs ain't the man to turn 'is back on 'im, be 'e friend or foe;" and, stooping down, he took the sick man's hand in his, and gazed sharply into his face.

Presently he let go the patient's hand and stood up.

"That 'ere old Baby Jane is a long time a-coming," he said, and, plucking me by the arm, he gave me to understand that he wanted to speak to me, and walked towards the entrance of the cave, as if to ascertain whether the old man was returning. I followed him.

"Mister," he said, addressing me, "that 'ere Long Piet ain't long for this 'ere world. I've seen a good bit of fever, and 'e 'as 'ad it about as bad as you can get it. If 'e gets another dose, off 'e goes, and nothing will stop 'im. I wish that 'ere old nigger would come with my quinine."

"I have been dosing him with it," I said.

"You 'ave, mister?" was the reply. "Well, you 'ave kept 'im alive and done all that can be done; but 'e's too

weak, and if 'e gets another attack off 'e goes, or my name ain't Solomon Isaacs!" With these words he walked back to the patient.

The night wore on ; hour after hour slipped by, but no Babijan came.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SOLOMON ISAACS THE GUN-RUNNER

I HAD been too much occupied with my own thoughts to wonder why Solomon Isaacs and his Portuguese companion had made their appearance in this strange way. They were both asleep now, lying on the floor of the cave, and, from the snores that Solomon was giving vent to, sleeping as comfortably as if enjoying the luxury of a spring-mattress. Long Piet, too, was slumbering, but his breath came and went in irregular gasps. The girl, who sat in her usual place, was, I knew wide awake. She never seemed to sleep. At last she rose, and walked towards the entrance of the cave.

Babijan had not returned with the canoe. I heard her splash the water a little as she stepped into it. Before I could realise what she was about to do, she was making her way through the rushes. I ran to the edge.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Father!" was the only reply, and she disappeared from view; but whether she swam up or down the stream, I could not tell.

A drowsy fit came over me. Solomon had had a

good sleep, and, being the only one to whom I could address myself, I tugged at his sleeve to awake him.

"I tell you it's the finest watch that ever ticked," he mumbled.

"Here, wake up! Solomon," I said. "I want you to keep watch a bit. I can't keep my eyes open any longer."

"Well, well, mister," he replied with a yawn, "I thought I was back at the old business again. And where's old Baby Jane and the girl?"

I told him that the old man had not come back, and what had happened to the girl.

"I don't like it, mister," he said, "I don't like it; but you get your sleep. Me and the Senhor will look after things, and we'll 'ave a talk by-and-by."

"You will find quinine, should you require it, in my saddle-bag," I said, pointing to it; and throwing myself on the ground, I was soon oblivious to all that was going on around me.

A confused, humming sound fell on my ears, and with a mighty stretch and yawn I awoke, and sat up. A thin streak of sunlight was pouring in through the low entrance. Solomon was sitting beside Long Piet's pallet. I got up, and went towards him.

"'Old on a bit, mister," he said, "I 'ave just finished."

He had my saddle-bag on his knees, which he was using as a desk, and was writing on a piece of paper, with which I had provided myself before starting.

"Now, mister!" he said, holding it up to me, "there we are as right as a trivet, and all we 'ave to do is to

get this 'ere Long Piet to sign it, and me and the Senhor will witness it. What do you say?"

I took the paper in my hand. At first I thought it was in a foreign language, but at last I made out that it was supposed to be English. It was nothing more or less than a confession of Long Piet, going into full details as to how he had been implicated in the frauds practised on me, giving the account of his transactions with Hans Van der Merwe, and repudiating the false charge he had preferred against me of the murder of the Bushman, and stating his reasons why he had done so, and asking for pardon as he hoped to get it.

"There, mister!" said Solomon, putting out his hand for the paper, "that will be a nut to crack for 'em, if they arrest you for that 'ere Bushman!"

I thought so too, but not exactly the same way that Solomon intended it should be, but I thanked him warmly for what he had done.

"You needn't thank me, mister," he said; "it's that 'ere Long Piet that put me up to it when he saw me take a bit of paper out of your saddle-bag. But come now," he continued, holding an indelible pencil, with which he had been writing, towards the sick man, and putting the sheet of paper before him, "just you fix your name there, Long Piet!"

"Ja," said the sick man as he took the pencil in his trembling fingers and with some difficulty sprawled his full name across the paper. Solomon signed as witness, then presented it to the Portuguese, who, with a great many flourishes, put a most imposing signature, being

blessed with so many names that it took the whole line to get them in.

"There, mister!" said Solomon, holding the paper towards me, "that ought to fix you up, and puzzle them fellers in Pretoria."

He opened it once more before giving it to me, gazed upon it with a look of admiration, for he afterwards told me it was the longest production he had ever written, and finally handed it to me as the Mayor of a great city might give the scroll that presents the recipient with its freedom.

"This ought to be sufficient guarantee for my safety," I said to Long Piet. "When you are a little stronger, what is there to prevent me going back the way I came?"

"Englishman," he replied in a faint voice, "you do not know what you are speaking about. I have told you the police lieutenant hates you; you have many other enemies besides. If you once fell into his hands, what is there to hinder his destroying the document? No, you do not know him. There is nothing some of these police will not do. As for me—you talk about my getting stronger! I tell you I shall never again crack a whip, drive a waggon, or mount a horse. My time is very near, and I know it."

"You will be all right in another week, and not speak like that," I said. "I can go then, and Babijan will look after you. Solomon," I continued, addressing myself to the good-natured little Jew, "you know all about my story. From what you have learned from Long Piet, you know that I am an innocent man, and that whatever charges they trump up against me, I am bound in the

long run to get the best of it. Perhaps there is one thing Piet did not tell you: that I have the command of plenty of money. I do not know what business brings you here, but if you and the Senhor will accompany me to Pretoria, and prove the truth of this written statement, I will make it well worth the while of both of you. Now, what do you say?"

Solomon's answer was certainly a most strange one, for he gave a long whistle, and kept on chuckling, and saying:

"Wants me to go to Pretoria! Me! Solomon Isaacs! to go to Pretoria! ha, ha! I can just fancy I can see myself doing it—having a talk, like, with Oom Paul—drinking coffee with 'im, ha, ha! It is too good! ha, ha! It makes me laugh, mister, s'elp me! it makes me laugh."

I looked at him as if he had lost his senses.

"No, no, mister!" he said; "don't think I'm going wrong up 'ere," and he touched his forehead; "no, no. I tell you, s'elp me! I'm all right in the upper storey; but you do make me laugh. Listen, and I will tell you who I am. I am Solomon Isaacs!"

"Well! what of that? You have told me that before," I replied, somewhat tartly.

"Look you 'ere, mister," said the little man, "don't you go and get your rag out. I know your affairs, but you don't know mine."

I was about to mention that I did not want to, but he waved his hand.

"No, I know what you was a-going to say, mister, but never mind; you shall know 'em. Why do you suppose I am in this 'ere 'ole, cooped up like a jackal? Do you think it is because I'm fond of picknicking? No; I tell

you it's because I'm Solomon Isaacs. Do you think I'm 'iding 'ere from the niggers? I tell you no, because I'm Soloman Isaacs; but ask me if I'm 'iding from the Transvaal police? I'll tell you, yes, because I'm Solomon Isaacs, the gun-runner!

"Don't think that I should want your money if I could right a wronged man by a-going with 'im to Pretoria; but you see, mister, I can no more go there than you, for of the two, even if you was guilty of murdering fifty Bushmen, they would rather 'ave me than you. So what I say is, join me and the Senhor, and when the right time comes, we will get out of this 'ere cursed country as soon as we can."

"But where?" I asked, for a light had dawned upon me, and I knew that my project of going to Pretoria with these two men was hopeless.

"Leave that to me," was the reply. "But will you come?"

I considered for a minute. If I went back the way I had come, I should in all probability meet with the fate Long Piet predicted.

"I am with you!" I said.

"Done!" said the little man, holding out his hand.

I took it.

He said something to the Portuguese, who made me a low bow, and advanced, as I thought, to embrace me, but I managed to avoid this by taking his skinny fingers in mine and giving them a shake.

"You don't want to go back on your word?" asked the little man.

"No," I said, "I have made up my mind."

So behold me the companion of two notorious gun-runners, liable to at least seven years' imprisonment if caught!

During the day Solomon related many of his experiences, and his reason for seeking a hiding in the cave. He had gone to the Woodbush village to meet Hans Van der Merwe, with whom he had had many smuggling and gun-running transactions. Not that the latter ever courted any risk in the actual delivery of arms to the natives; he was far too cunning for that; but as Solomon's payments were almost invariably made in kine, the wily Hans undertook to sell the cattle at the various large centres, such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Krugersdorp, and other places. In consideration of this he took half the profit.

At first his remittances of the half share were pretty regular, but latterly he had not paid up, and, besides the cattle transactions, owed Solomon a considerable sum for two waggon-loads of gin that the latter had succeeded in smuggling across the Transvaal border at Komati Poorte, not an over difficult matter at the time, as the Transvaal officials, who represented the Customs at that place, were always open to bribes, and addicted to drink, and it is a well-known and authenticated fact that many a transport rider, after treating the Custom officials to a liberal supply of whisky, has in the dead of night safely crossed the border with his waggons without paying a cent of duty, whilst the drunken representatives of Transvaal authority were snoring in their beds.

To go on with Solomon's story. Having arrived at

the rendezvous agreed upon, he waited for a considerable time, but as Van der Merwe did not put in his appearance, he pushed on towards the Woodbush village, where he fell in with an old accomplice of Hans.

He knew him well, for he had often handed him over cattle for that worthy. Under the pretence of taking his cattle to feed in the low country, this man used at stated times to leave the Woodbush village and go east. He himself never was a big cattle owner, and one or two of his Boer neighbours, who had accidentally met him near Johannesburg and Pretoria, had been surprised to find how his herd had increased during his short absence from his native village.

This he explained by saying he was driving cattle for other people.

To Solomon's surprise, when they met he looked askance at him, and without even the ordinary greeting rode past. Solomon was wondering what could be the meaning of this conduct when he heard him turn his horse and follow him. Isaacs drew up his mule team, and waited. The man rode up, and, when questioned by Solomon why he had treated him in such a strange manner, the truth came out. It was not prompted by any real regard he had for the Jew, but a feeling of resentment against Hans, who had not paid him for some months, and kept continually putting him off with all sorts of excuses, then had told him that he did not intend to pay him at all, and, laughing, stated that, if he wanted to get his money, he had better sue him for it. Of course he knew that this was impossible, for the latter had taken good care that his name did not appear

in any transaction, and the Boer, for a wonder, had actually handed him over the whole proceeds of the sales. Hans further gave him to understand that, if he did not want to get into prison for gun-running with Solomon, a Portuguese, and perhaps an Englishman he knew of, he had better keep a civil tongue in his head. This frightened the Boer so much that he then and there agreed to forsake his claim ; thereupon Hans told him that he had made arrangements for Solomon and the Portuguese to meet him at a place some sixteen miles away, and that he, Hans, with the acting Landrost of the Woodbush village, the lieutenant of police, and about a dozen men, would be there to arrest both Solomon and the Portuguese.

Finally, the Boer told Solomon that he gave him the information for two reasons—the first that he might get away, though he did not think he had much chance ; the second, that, if he was caught, he would remember who warned him, and whatever he might have to say to the judge in Pretoria, he would leave his name out. The Boer then put spurs to his horse and rode away.

Solomon at once turned his mules, and, making a wide circuit, avoided the rendezvous he had given Hans, and by forced marches, and the aid of the natives, to whom he was well known, had managed to elude the police, but on nearing Babijan's kraal heard they were close on his rear, and thus his presence in the cave was accounted for.

"But the men who left here shouting and waving their assegais as if they were going to murder all the Boers in the Transvaal—what about them?" I asked.

"Bah!" he said, "the Transvaal people have known of the coming rising all the time; there are plenty of traitors in the camp. Only a few of the swaggering crowd you saw got as far as old Majaja's; most of them have been shot, or taken prisoners. The sjambok is hard at work on them, and the police will be here before you know where you are."

"How is it you did not mention anything about the rising and its failure before?" I asked Solomon.

"Mister," he said, "I often 'ave to go into strange company, and I've learnt to 'old my tongue; 'ow did I know, seeing you with that 'ere long Piet, that you warn't in with them Boer fellers. I don't mean that you were a great friend of theirs—for I never knowed a right-minded Englishman as was—but you might not 'ave minded asking Oom Paul for the trifle they 'ave put on this," and he tapped his head. "S'elp me, mister, I did 'ave some misgivings when I came in 'ere, but now I knows all about you, and you're one of us, well, it's all right, and you'll find that Solomon Isaacs will stick to you through thick and thin, until 'e 'as seen you through this business. Yes, mister, I 'eard the news when I came along; it's worse than the time when they took old Malabok in chains to Pretoria. There ain't a Boer farmer for miles round Pietersburg, Marabastadt, and Smitsdorp that won't 'ave free labour for years to come. Men, women, and children will be parcelled out between 'em. They calls 'em prisoners of war in this country, in others they might call it slavery; and, as for pay, they get as much sjambok as they can put up with, and a good deal more besides!"

"Is it possible, Solomon, that this state of affairs really exists now?"

"Well, mister, either you are green, or you are 'aving me on. You've knocked about this country a bit, or you wouldn't speak Zulu or Cape Dutch as you do, and yet you ask me: 'Is it possible?' Mister, it is possible. It is now, it was, and as long as the British lion goes to sleep, and them Uitlanders let them Pretoria fellers do what they like, it always will be. Mark you, mister, these Boer fellers are pretty cute; you won't find what they call prisoners of war working on the farms near the big towns like Johannesburg, and Pretoria. There the Landrost, the field-cornet, and their chums employ the convicts to do their work, and the more convicts they can make, why, the better for 'em. Why, mister, you must remember the time when they used to run a nigger in for walking on the side path. You know this is true, so don't try and get at me any more. I tell you, mister, that nearly every farm in this district is worked by prisoners of war, and their children that are born on the farm go on in the same way, and the Boer gets 'is work done for nothing. Did you ever know a Boer do 'ard work 'imself, or did you ever 'ear of 'im paying the niggers that were working for 'im? Mister, you must 'ave travelled this country with your eyes shut and your ears closed!"

I certainly had heard all this before, but had always looked upon these statements as grossly exaggerated, but I have learnt differently now.

In this way Solomon and I chatted on, occasionally attending to Long Piet's wants, whilst the Portuguese

sat silently smoking cigarette after cigarette, which, in spite of the roughness of the tobacco, he seemed to twist up with the greatest of ease.

The afternoon wore on, the sun sank lower and lower, a distant rumble of thunder told us that we might look forward to another seasonable storm, but still no Babijan or his grand-daughter returned. What could have happened to them? The old man had been away for nearly twenty-four hours, the girl since before dawn. We had no lack of provisions: on that point we were well provided; but I began to feel uncomfortable, and, in spite of Solomon's airy way, and the apparent indifference of the Portuguese, I could see that they too shared my feelings.

CHAPTER XXIX

LONG PIET LEAVES ME

SOLOMON had just finished telling me some of his adventures, and how, before coming here, he had succeeded in crossing the river, about four miles down, and hiding his light cart and four mules in a thick jungle, where they were supplied with fodder by a native on whom he could rely—when we both started. There was a shot, then another, and another, and more in rapid succession. We walked towards the entrance of the cave; the storm had begun, the rain was falling in torrents, the lurid flashing of the lightning was reflected in the water, and the thunder crackled overhead.

In spite of all this hubbub I thought I heard a splash close to our hiding-place. I was not mistaken, for a few seconds later the reeds parted a little, and the head of Babijan appeared through them. He had no canoe, but had evidently swum. He stooped down low, as if to hide himself from any one who might be on the top of the bank, and, as he entered the cave, put his finger on his lips, as if to enforce silence, at the same time pointed with the other hand to the top of the cave.

For a moment he stood as if in the act of listening, then motioned us to go towards the interior. The first

thing he did was to take a long and scrutinising look at Long Piet, who appeared to be sleeping. Then, in a hoarse whisper he began:

"They are there!" and he pointed up to the roof of the cavern.

"Who are there?" I asked.

"Who! Why the police, of course," was the reply. "They had Babijan tied fast in his kraal. Look!" he continued, thrusting out his hands, "look at these wrists, and at these legs! I thought they would never be free again, but Katana! ah, Katana! she is the daughter of the son of Babijan, she it is that broke the bonds that bound Babijan! Ha! ha!" he said, in an exultant way, "they did not know the little Katana, the little bird that sings peek, peek, can peck sometimes!"

He then told us that when he had gone for Solomon's medicine the night before, he suddenly felt the cold muzzle of a rifle pressed against his bare back, with a command to stand or it would be instant death; and, before he could fully realise his situation, he was surrounded on all sides by Boer police, and in their midst he recognised the brother of the man whose head had been decapitated by Wildebeeste and the Prowling Leopard.

When this man saw that he was secured against all harm, he came forward, and accused him, before the Boers, of being the chief instigator of the rising, and of being one of the most active in supplying arms, and harbouring whites who brought them into the country. The Boers were in great glee, and promised Babijan the highest tree they could find for him to hang on, and told him that, when he was dangling by the neck, they would

see if it would harm him, he being such a mighty witch-doctor, and whether he would be able to keep back the bullets they intended to riddle him with.

"But my mules and the little cart?" said Solomon, interrupting him.

"They are quite safe," replied the old man; "that is, I heard nothing about them, and they would have spoken had they found them."

"But how did you get away?" I asked.

Without immediately answering my question, he went quietly towards the entrance of the cavern, waded a little way into the water; apparently he seemed satisfied, for he came back to us and resumed his narrative.

"They took Babijan to his kraal—he! he! he! to his kraal! Where better could they have taken him? They bound me hand and foot, and put me sitting on my stool. 'Tell us, O Babijan,' one said, 'why thou dost not burst these bonds, and call upon the rain to drown us, and the lightning to strike us dead?' then they laughed. Four men there were that slept within the kraal, and twice the number ten outside. At last they grew weary of talking, and said they would sleep. They told me that the kraal was small, that I must sit whilst they would lie. 'For on the morrow,' said they, 'you will have sleep enough, from which the thunder you say you can order will not even wake you.' So they laid them down on the floor; but before they did so one put a long reim round my neck, and tied it to his arm. 'It will save thee time in the morn,' he said, 'if I put thy necklace on thee now!' Then he turned, and slept as did the other three.

"I sat and I thought, and the hours came and the hours went; but what could Babijan do, for my hands were fast behind my back, and my feet were bound together, and should I but turn my head, he that held the reim would wake?

"There was a man outside the kraal who paced up and down; I could hear him. More than once he thrust his head in, and once he called softly, so as not to awaken his friends: 'Babijan, the day will break shortly, and the sun will rise; you, too, will rise as it does, but not so high, Babijan! Look at it well, Babijan, when it comes, for you will never see it rise again!' then he laughed; and I heard him singing softly as he walked about outside.

"It was now the hour before dawn; all was dark, and quiet, and still. No; all was not still, for there is no jackal that can hear like Babijan. Creep, creep, softly, softly, and I heard the curtain move. 'Father!' but oh, so softly!—oh, so quietly! It was all Babijan heard, but it was enough. Katana, my little Katana, was there! Gently she lay at my feet, sharply cut the keen knife, and they were free; the hands, too, were freed. Then Katana cut the reim that held me round the neck. I rose to my feet to fly, but they refused to move, so tightly had they been tied. He who held the reim cried out, 'He is going!' and would spring upon me; but he will never speak again, for the blade that set me free was buried in his heart! I found my legs, rushed through the curtain, and with my little Katana was free.

"They followed only for a few yards, for they feared

the darkness of the cavern. Many shots they fired, and we laughed as we lay in the little room where you slept. Then I crept away down the passage to come and see my Baasie, but when I reached the tree there were many men about, so I had to wait, and wait; at last I could wait no longer. The storm came, they would go for shelter; I burst through the bush and ran. They were near me once, very; but I ran amongst the trees, and then on here. You know the rest, and now I will see my Baasie."

He turned towards the pallet. A moment later there was a wild shriek, and he dropped upon the ground; for whilst we had been listening to the faithful being who had risked his life to see him, be near him, and tend him, the Angel of Death had visited the cavern, and without a sigh, without a moan, the spirit of Long Piet had passed away.

CHAPTER XXX

A RACE FOR LIFE AND LIBERTY

I WILL pass over the grief of Babijan, and the general sense of gloom and oppression that fell upon us. Suffice it to say that that night was one which is best forgotten, but not easy to forget; and, when a glimmer in the sky told of the approaching day, I doubt if I had closed my eyes. The continued low moaning of the old man the long night through reminded me of what had happened, and, though I lay courting sleep, it never came. With Solomon and the Portuguese it was different, and their regular breathing told me they were sleeping soundly.

The day was just breaking when there was a faint splash, and in another moment the dripping figure of the girl, Katana, entered. She went straight to the old man. From the manner in which she spoke it was evident that a glance had told her what had happened.

She knew how her grandfather had loved the man for whom he had risked so much. To her Piet had been a stranger, it was not natural she should give way to grief, but her voice though clear, was low and subdued when she spoke to her grandsire, for she knew that he was suffering.

"Father," she said, addressing him, "you must listen to Katana."

The old man mumbled out something, but did not seem to heed her. His fiery spirit was broken. But the girl would not be put off.

"Father," she continued, "it is Katana, the little Katana that speaks to you, and you must listen."

"Daughter, what would you with me? Leave me by the little Baasie; he can but sleep, he can but sleep, and will wake soon!"

"Father," said the girl in a determined voice, "you must listen to Katana," and she took him by the arm and shook him.

"Speak, then, but speak low, for I would not wake the Baasie."

It seemed for the moment that his brain was wandering. I could see the girl thought so too, for she half turned herself to me, as if wishing to address us both.

"This day must thou go, father—this day, and now—and the mulungu, thy friends, with thee."

"The mulungu! my friends!" said the old man fiercely. "Ja, ja, they were friends to him, and so are friends of mine. Babijan will go, but let me know all, daughter."

A change came over him, and he was all attention.

"Last night," said the girl, "the sjambok was hard at work. Three men and two women did they fasten to the big tree, for they would know where you were hid, but none could tell; for, though the sjambok cut, and the men writhed, and the women shrieked with pain, said none of them a word, for they could not, or, it may

be, they would not. But he that betrayed thee, father, he to whom they had promised much, was yester morn taken hence to mind the oxen and tend the sheep of one beyond the Majaja mountain, but they have sent that he must return and show them where thou art, and before the sun has left the land he, too, will be here. So I told Mali, that would have me to wife: 'Thou must go far up the river, and take with thee two boxes of the bright iron that holds the flesh of oxen, which the trader gave to my father, and thou shalt also take a calabash of the fire-water that was also the trader's gift. There shalt thou make a great fire, that the smoke may be seen afar. The boxes shalt thou open; of one thou shalt half eat, and the black calabash that holds the fire-water shalt thou also open, but shalt thou not drink of it, but half shalt thou throw upon the ground. Then shalt thou return in haste, and come to the white men and say: "O white men! that seek Babijan and the white men that are with him, I come but from the river, where there is a great smoke, and by the fire that burns; there lay two boxes of iron that holds the meat that the white men who come with the guns to sell eat, and a calabash of the strong water that they drink. It may happen that they are near the spot, and that the Babijan is with them." Then shalt thou also say: "If thou wouldst find these men, some must follow me, and others must ride towards the setting sun, for there the bush is thick, and it is there they will go." Then take thee to the bush and go thyself, thy legs are strong, and thou canst run; and if the white men should kill thee, then thou hast died for Katana. If they catch and flog thee, it

will last but for a day, and when the time has come that this land is at peace once more, then will thy Katana wait for thee.' Thus, father, I spoke to Mali, and so it has been done, for the white men leave before the sun is up, and but four of them await their return. So, father, go whilst there is time, and take the mulungu with thee."

"Daughter, thou hast done well," said the old man; and, taking her aside, he spoke earnestly for a few minutes, then she left the cavern.

Babijan turned to the far corner of our abode, and by the aid of a knife proceeded to dig. In the meantime Solomon and his friend the Portuguese were wide awake, and I immediately put them in possession of the news the girl had brought. The former addressed a few words to his companion, and without further ado commenced in a very business-like way to prepare for a departure.

By this time Babijan had unearthed a bundle. It was of oblong shape, and appeared to be heavy. Slitting the skin that formed the cover, he produced a rifle, several packages of ammunition, and a small bag that jingled when he put it on the ground. Solomon's eye glistened when he heard the sound, and I heard him say, "S'elp me!"

By this time the girl had returned. She said a few low words to Babijan.

"Go into the boat, Baas," he said to me, "and the girl will go with you."

I went towards the entrance of the cave, found the canoe had been returned, then shouldering my rifle

which I had never allowed to depart from my side, I ventured into the frail bark. The girl took the paddle. As we shot through the reeds she stood up and looked around. The sun was just rising. She dipped her paddle in the water, and we went at a rapid pace down stream. She kept close to the rushes that grew in the water, further screened by a dense tangle of brushwood coming down to the river bank, and this again was backed by a wood of mighty trees.

We proceeded for about two hundred yards, then, shooting straight in through the rushes, I found that I could land with ease, and that a small path lay between the long reeds and the brushwood that fringed them.

Pointing down the path, she said: "Go for ten times ten paces there, then wait, and mind the snakes."

In another second she had vanished, and I once more heard her paddle gently touch the water.

I followed her instructions, both in going the number of paces and looking out for the snakes. Scarcely five minutes had passed before I was joined by the Portuguese; another few minutes, and Solomon stood by us; a quarter of an hour later, Babijan put in his appearance. All traces of distress either at the loss of his late master, or parting with his grand-daughter had vanished, and he was once more the alert, sharp-witted, cunning old savage. As he came up I could not refrain from putting the question:

"What about your old master?"

"He is no more," was the reply; "the Tagati has taken him. If they find him they can do him no harm; it would be different with us, so come."

This was the last reference he ever made to the man he had served so well, and whether the remains of my late companion were ever found, or whether they sleep undisturbed in the old witch-doctor's cave on the banks of the Mozama river, I know not to this day.

We hurried along at a rapid rate, old Babijan keeping some fifty paces ahead, acting as guide and scout.

In about an hour we reached the hiding-place of the cart and mules. We lost no time in inspanning, and I told Solomon that he would now have an opportunity of putting to the test the wind-like alacrity and speed that he had boasted his animals possessed. We certainly started at a very good pace for mules, over the uneven ground we had to travel.

There must have been, as the crow flies, some three miles of forest belt between us and Babijan's kraal, where the police had taken up their quarters; and as we were following down the course of the river, which ran almost south-east, we increased our distance at every step. If we had not been heard or seen there was little risk of our being overtaken.

In spite of the broiling heat we kept on and on, occasionally we would get out and walk to ease the mules.

In less than four hours we had arrived at the junction of the Mozama river with the Tabanyana, a distance of twenty miles. We crossed the latter stream, and pushed on for the Great Letaba, only sixteen miles ahead. When across that river we might consider ourselves fairly out of danger; so Solomon said, and he appeared to know every inch of the country.

We were separated from the Great Letaba by a lofty range of hills, and it was whilst we were trudging on beside the jaded mules that I heard a distant rumble. Another storm, I thought, but Babijan, who was a little on ahead, came running back.

"She has done it, Baas!" he said, addressing me; "she has done it—the little Katana that sings peek, peek, has done it!"

"What has she done?" I said in surprise.

"Have you not ears?" asked the old man; "did you not hear?"

"Certainly I heard the distant thunder," I replied.

"Thunder! ja, ja, thunder, Baas! True it is thunder, but the thunder that the white men make, and that the Baas there," pointing at Solomon, "has sold me many a barrel of. That is the thunder you heard. It is the little Katana that fired it—the little Katana! It is the signal that the police have returned, and that the kraal of Babijan, perhaps the cave where the Tagati and old Japie live, are no more."

He then told us that he had given his last instructions to his grand-daughter to lay a train of powder from where she knew so well he kept it, and to fire it when she saw the Boer party returning.

I ascertained from Solomon that he had at least fifty barrels stowed away, and the shock must have been tremendous.

"But your daughter," I asked, "will she be safe?"

"Ja," was the reply, and the old man jogged on ahead.

Slowly, slowly, very slowly, Solomon's tired animals

dragged the light cart up their tedious course. At last, unable to get a step further, we decided to call a halt, and have a long-wanted rest and refreshment.

We found a convenient place to outspan. We had arrived at the summit of one of the hills, another small chain lay before us, from which we were separated by a fairly level piece of country about four miles in width. To the right and left, at a distance of about a mile, ran two ranges of hills thickly covered with bush and forest. Beyond the hills to our front lay the valley of the Great Letaba.

"Them mules is tired, mister," said Solomon; "there's a lot of work afore 'em yet; they wants rest—so do we—so we will just stick in this 'ere snug little 'ole, until the moon is up, and then on we goes again. There ain't much chance that any of them police fellers knows this 'ere way, and when once we are over the 'ills, why, they can whistle for us! It's about mid-day," he continued, looking up at the sun, "so we'll 'ave a good time 'ere, and get old Baby Jane to cook us some coffee, and 'e can go and 'ave a look round every now and then."

"Are you sure they could not follow us?" I asked.

"Well, mister, there's only one way they could come that could bring 'em 'ere under four hours, and that's right across the Mozama, in front of the village, but, lor' bless you! none of 'em knows the track, and this way we could see 'em for quite ten miles."

So we ate our food, drank our coffee, lit our pipes, talked over our different arrangements, and fell asleep,

and it was out of a pleasant dream that I was suddenly awakened by the voice of Solomon.

"'Urry up, mister! 'Ooky-pooky, 'ere's them 'ere police a-coming, and them blessed mules 'alf a mile away!"

I sprang to my feet, seized a pair of binoculars that were lying on the ground near me, and ran to the edge of the hill that gave me an expansive view over the surrounding country. Four little dots were scampering across the open ground at the foot of the hill, taking advantage of every piece of cover they could find. I gazed at them intently; sure enough they must be police, and coming the very way Solomon had told me only a short time before they would never know of. Had the mules been ready it would have been all right, and we could have been off long before they mounted the steep acclivity before them, but, though Babijan and the Portuguese were doing their best to catch them, the stupid brutes were scudding in all directions, and were evidently bent on not giving up their freedom in a hurry. The old saying, "Stupid as a mule," come back to me, but from their point of view they were not so stupid after all.

At last, much to the relief of Solomon and myself, the Portuguese succeeded in catching two of the beasts, and came rapidly towards us. The other two had trotted up the valley in the direction we were to head for, and, do what he would, Babijan appeared unable to turn them.

In another ten minutes the animals had reached us, and we inspanned them with feverish haste. Throwing the remainder of the harness into the cart we prepared to mount into it, when the same thought appeared to

run through the mind of the Portuguese and myself, for we both ran towards the edge of the hill and glanced down, leaving the mules to the care of Solomon.

Two of the police had begun their upward journey, and every now and then we could catch a glimpse of them as they wound slowly up; the other two were still in the plain some distance behind.

"You have a good rifle," said a voice beside me in perfect English, though with a slight foreign accent, "you could reach them now."

It was the Portuguese who had spoken. I looked at him in astonishment, but he only smiled, showing his white teeth, and pointed down. It was no time to ask for explanations, though until now I was quite unaware that he knew a word of my tongue, so I simply answered:

"No, their blood shall not be on my hands if I can help it; it will only be the last extremity that will make me appeal to force," and, turning towards the cart, quickly followed by my companion, we jumped in, and Solomon drove rapidly away. A strange smile was playing about the mouth of the Portuguese; it seemed to say: "What is the world coming to? Here is a man who refuses to shoot a Transvaal policeman when his own life may be at stake!"

I could make out through Solomon's field-glasses that Babijan had caught the mules, and was now waiting in our direct front at the far end of the valley where we should have to commence our ascent. As we got nearer I could also see that we should not actually have to pass over the top of the hill that fronted us, but through a kind of cleft in the range.

We had gone about two miles when the Portuguese said quietly:

"They come!"

As he spoke I heard the distant report of a shot.

"Now, Solomon," I said, "you will have to put your mules to it. As long as we can keep about two thousand yards away from them we are pretty safe, but if we get much nearer their rifles will reach, and on an open plain like this the cart makes a fairly good target."

The police gradually gained on us. We reached Babijan, and never were two mules more speedily inspanned, but even that short delay had brought us into range. One or two bullets struck the ground near us. Solomon shouted and yelled to his mules, and the animals put on a spurt, and for a little time we gained on our pursuers. At last one bullet whistled over our heads.

"S'elp me, mister! I don't like that," said Solomon, as he gave a bob. I was sitting at the back of the cart, intently gazing through the glasses. One man on an iron-grey horse was coming up fast. It could not be? Yes, it was!—he was riding my old Blessbok, and even at that distance I could almost swear it was the police lieutenant.

Another man was within about fifty yards of him, and two others quite a quarter of a mile behind.

We were now crawling up the ridge. The Portuguese and I had dismounted, and were running on either side of the cart. Solomon was lying at full length at the bottom.

They were rapidly gaining on us, and could now only be about five hundred yards off. Would it be fair

for me to fire? I slipped in a cartridge, and I saw the Portuguese smile. Should I? The foremost rider had reined up his horse to take a more deliberate aim. As we had not returned his fire he must have thought we had no firearms. The other man was coming on rapidly behind. I put my rifle to my shoulder. Two reports rang out almost at the same moment, but *I* had not pulled my trigger. My good old horse dropped, and the police lieutenant with him, the man behind, unable to check his speed, fell over them, and, as he did so, I heard a hoarse laugh, and Babijan, with his still smoking rifle, rose from the ground about fifty paces to the right of us. We reached the top of the ridge. I glanced back; one man was scrambling to his feet.

"Jump in!" said Solomon. We heard Babijan give a yell of defiance; I turned, he was standing on the ridge waving his rifle above his head. There was a report—a cry—and he fell to the ground.

"Stop!" said the Portuguese as he leapt out. Running back quickly he threw himself on the ground, seized the fallen man's weapon, and a moment later shot after shot rang out; then, with a cry of derision, and a yell of defiance, he leapt to his feet.

"They are running, the curs!" he said, "they run! Ah! they have found it is a different thing to shoot at men with rifles in their hands, to shooting at what they thought were unarmed men in a cart."

Both Solomon and I ran to the ridge; sure enough the police were in full retreat, two of them riding on one horse. The Portuguese raised his rifle in the air and fired another shot far above their heads; it seemed to add

fresh speed to their horse's legs, and through the field-glasses I could make out that they were spurring and whipping for all they were worth, nor did they draw rein until they arrived at the verge of the hill, and we saw them disappear from view.

"They won't be in a 'urry to come back," said Solomon with a grin. "Come, mister, let us be getting on."

I pointed to Babijan.

"Yes, mister," said Solomon, as he looked at the prostrate form, "'e was a good old feller in spite of 'is black skin, so we'll find a 'ole to put 'im in."

In less than ten minutes an antbear hole held all that remained of the once feared and mighty witch-doctor. A big stone was rolled across the mouth, and we then descended into the valley of the Great Letaba river.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW I MEET HALLIMOND

BEFORE our sleep in the afternoon Solomon and I had formulated our plans. He had informed me that, five miles beyond the junction of the Great Letaba with the Olifants river, just beyond the Transvaal boundary, and consequently situated in Portuguese territory, he had what he called "a snug little 'ome," from which place, in consideration of gold dust and nuggets, ivory, skins, and other odds and ends, he dispensed rifles and ammunition to those natives on Transvaal soil who were disposed to deal with him. He was very well known in the district, and had done a roaring trade there for some years, as he had also done on other parts of the eastern boundary of the Transvaal.

He pressed me to accompany him to this house. I assured him that at any other time I should have been pleased to do so, but that from what he knew of my circumstances, it was obvious that I had no time to spare, and must use my very best endeavour to arrive at Middelburg as speedily as possible. So, after a little parleying, it was arranged that we should go together as far as the Palabora mountain, from which place he said he could easily get to the border without any

danger to himself. I was then to proceed with the cart and mules by myself, which, as I had no security to offer, he had agreed to part with at his own risk for a very reasonable sum to be paid to his account at the Standard Bank in Durban, Natal.

So under the bright rays of the moon we crossed the Great Letaba river by a ford well known to Solomon, and before many hours had gained the shelter of the dense forest that covers the slopes of the mighty Palabora mountain.

In the twenty hours since our departure from the Mozama river we had covered no less than fifty-five miles, and this across rivers, up hills, and over a track that would almost seem impassable to the ordinary traveller. It was clear the mules would require rest, and this we determined to give them before finally separating—Solomon to go his fifty miles due east, which would bring him to his destination, and I to shape my course as near as I could in a south-westerly direction, over the one hundred and eighty to two hundred miles that separated me from Middelburg.

So we remained snug for a couple of days, and during that time, under the guidance of Solomon, I visited some of the old copper smelting works that are supposed to have been used by the ancients some thousands of years ago; for the strange, rudely-cast earthen pipes that are twisted and turned in all sorts of fantastic shapes, are far beyond the ken of any tribe that might have inhabited this region for many generations, and scientists are inclined to think that these relics date back to the time of the Phœnicians.

We chatted over many things, and amongst others I asked Solomon if he knew anything of the Landrost of the Woodbush village.

"Mister," he said, "I knew 'im well years ago; 'e was then a clerk in the Cape Civil Service stationed at Kimberley, but for all that there was not a bigger I.D.B. (illicit diamond buyer) on the Fields than 'e was."

"I thought so," I replied; "I was sure of it, for by the light of day, in spite of his black beard, I had recognised him. He forged a name, embezzled a large sum, and left his wife and child to starve."

"Mister, you are about right, but now 'e is a worthy servant of a worthy government. 'Is wife died, so I 'eard, and 'e is married again."

"No, Solomon, his wife is not dead, but she thinks he is. She lives in Cape Town; and that is why I wrote on the paper I threw him at my trial the two words, 'forger and bigamist.'"

"Well, well," said Solomon, "there are strange lands in this 'ere world, but this 'un beats 'em all."

The country through which we had passed since crossing the Great Letaba had been thickly populated. All the inhabitants seemed to know Solomon, and men, women, and children welcomed him as we passed by.

"There ain't no fear of the police a-catching us now," he had said, "as the people are better than any telegraph wire, and, lor' bless you! they knows better than to come down in these 'ere parts! Do you know that toon, 'The Roast Beef of Old England'?" he asked, looking at me seriously, "'cos, if you don't,

listen to this," and a moment later he produced a mouth organ, that boys play on, from his pocket, and struck up the old familiar air. I could not but help smiling to see Solomon running the instrument backwards and forwards across his lips.

"Yes, mister," he said, "you may laugh, but that's the toon that's a-going to carry you across this 'ere country. 'Ere, take the hinstrument and 'ave a try. They all knows it from the border to Mazelle's kraal, and this 'ere cart, them 'ere mules, that 'ere toon, and this 'ere flag"—here he produced a marvellous pocket-handkerchief covered with beasts and birds of all sorts and conditions—"will work wonders for you."

I took the instrument, and, after some instructions from my teacher, managed after a fashion to tootle out, "The Roast Beef of Old England." It was sufficiently good to satisfy Solomon, so I stopped my lesson, promising to practise on my journey when opportunity offered.

The next day I parted from my good friend Solomon and his Portuguese companion.

"Remember the toon, mister!—remember the toon!" were his last words to me. I waved my flag in reply, and rattled on over the rough track to Mashimana Berg, which lay at a distance of twenty miles, where I had decided to pass the night. It was there I crossed the Olifants river.

Solomon had pretty well laid out my route for me. I found it a very different matter travelling by myself to being with one who knew every inch of the country. However, after some two weeks of roughing it in all manner of ways, I once more found myself in the

neighbourhood of Maleuw's Kop, having passed Maabil Kraals, and crossed the Spekboom and Dwars rivers.

Solomon's talismans,the mouth organ and handkerchief, had worked wonders. Everywhere I was received with kindness, helped in food and forage, but everywhere was the same old story of cruel oppression and injustice, and assegais were shaken, clubs raised, and smiles turned to scowls when the hated Boer was spoken of.

What strange things had happened since I last saw the round-topped height of Maleuw's Kop! But now my journey was almost at an end; in another twenty-four hours I should be in Middelburg. So I called to the mules, we sped smartly on, and ere long were on the main road—the very road which led to the Olifants river drift where all my misfortunes had begun.

Every here and there I could catch a glimpse of the river itself as it wound in and out between the hills. But I was now on the east or rather south bank of the stream, and there was no occasion to cross it again before I entered Middelburg. What is more, I had no desire to, and I hastened rapidly on towards the Cobalt mine, situated on the banks of the Selon river; there I expected to get a rest and food for myself and beasts.

I was within sight of the building that had once been the residence of the late manager, but which had been attacked during the Sekukuni war, and now with its shot-riddled windows and doors, and charred remains of part of the roof, stood empty and forlorn as a remnant of the past, to testify to the deadly struggle that had raged round it,when—but I noticed a native some distance ahead.

His strange conduct excited my curiosity. Every now and then he would dive into the bush, wait until I nearly came abreast of him, then bound out on to the road and race on again. I thought of a plan to bring him to close quarters.

Cautiously taking my rifle from the bottom of the cart I rested it on the seat near me, and as he again sprang into the road, but always with his face from me, I called to him to stop or I would shoot. He whisked round in an instant, as if struck by something, and came rapidly towards me. Our eyes met, and in almost the same breath I had ejaculated "Basket!" whilst he had said "Inkoss!"

It was indeed Basket, my old waggon-driver, and he soon testified his delight at seeing me by a series of jumps, bounds, and yells, and an extravagance of language of which none but a native could be capable.

"Inkoss! Inkoss!" he shouted, "the mulungu who saved his Basket from the sjambok, the one who spoke and it was done, the slayer of lions, the father and mother of his child, Basket! The eyes and heart of Basket are gladdened to see his master, that he may serve him and do as he may wish," and he threw himself down on his knees near the cart, and put both his hands on his head.

Sentiment is not one of my strong points, so I simply said:

"Yes, Basket, I am glad to meet you again, but whence come you, and whither are you bound? and why does Basket run as the doe would from the lion, fearful yet attracted to the king of the forest?"

"Inkoss, Inkoss, the way is long, and the time is short, so Basket will speak as the white men do to each other, that my father may hear strange things from his Basket. Know, then, that I come from the brother of the Inkoss, the mulungu who digs for the black stones that burn as the wood of the forest."

"Hallimond?" I said with great surprise.

"It is as the Inkoss has spoken, for, at the great canteen in Middelburg, it is thus I hear the white men call him."

"But where is he?" I asked. "You say you come from him, and yet you go to Middelburg, and do not come from thence?"

"Inkoss! the men of sheep and oxen, the men who steal, and lie, and flog, the brothers of the Landrost of Middelburg, and the Groote Baas Hans, hold him!"

"But where—where?" I said impatiently.

"It is far from here, across the great river from whence Basket has come, but Basket knows the place well, and would hurry to Middelburg to see the mulungu at the big canteen, for so said the white man that digs for the black stones, the friend of the Inkoss: 'Go thou to Middelburg, and bring hither the mulungu of the great canteen and many of his brothers.'"

I did not listen to any more, but turned my beasts, and, ere sundown, had crossed the Olifants river, and was on my way to the Boer house near the spruit, where I had overheard so much, and which, from what Basket had told me, I concluded was the prison of my old chum. I arrived at the turning; should I go down alone, or leave the trap with Basket? Better take the

trap, I thought, and through the inky darkness I once more descended the deep kloof, not this time as a prisoner in my own waggon, but what might happen, who could tell?

Half way down the kloof we hid the little cart and mules in a small clearing we discovered at some distance from the path. There was no fear of them being seen.

"Now, Basket," I said, "can you fight? for this night you may have to strike some hard blows."

"Inkoss, Inkoss, the assegai of my people I have laid aside, but yet I will stand by my white father should he want the aid of Basket's arm," and, turning from me, I heard him cutting away at a tree. Presently he came up. "The arm of Basket and this are at the word of the Inkoss," he said, as he pushed a cudgel heavy enough to fell an ox into my hand.

"Good, Basket; strike hard if you do strike," and without another word we both stepped out, and it was not long before I heard the gurgling of the stream below me, where I had lain in concealment, and at whose bottom the two rifles were hidden away. They might be useful I thought. I soon found the old spot, and in less than ten minutes they were in my hands, and after a little greasing and a good wipe appeared to be little the worse for their bath.

I had formed my plan of campaign.

We were first to go to the stable and let all the horses loose. We were then to take them across the veldt for about a quarter of a mile, tying them up in a place Basket knew of, where they would not be discovered in a hurry. Returning to the house, Basket was to thunder at the

door with his cudgel, crying out that the horses had been stolen from the stable. He was then to dart away to the right, calling out for them to come on and follow the thieves with him, as he knew where they were. He was to fire a shot once or twice, and then return to me. I, in the meantime, would take up my station right in front of the house, where I had overheard the conversation between Viljoen and Hans.

If anything is calculated to make a Boer jump out of his sleep, it is to hear that his horses are stolen. I knew this.

As Basket thundered at the door, and gave out the stirring tidings, there was an instant bustle inside, a light shone, and almost before the native could get away into the darkness, the door was thrown open, and several figures emerged.

I could hear Basket rushing away in the opposite direction to the one in which we had taken the horses.

"Follow, white men, follow!" he shouted, "or the horses will be lost!"

"I hear no horses," said a voice I yet recognised as that of the man I had heard called Slim Koos. "The black devil must be playing jokes with us; it will go hard with his skin if I catch him."

"But let us try the stable," said a voice I did not know, "we can but see for ourselves;" and the speaker darted away in the direction of the outbuilding. A few minutes later he kept yelling back: "The horses are gone!—all gone! The man was right! Quick, let us follow, there is no time to lose!"

A faint cry came across the veldt, then a shot, followed by another.

"It must be the black devils who worked for us last month, and whom we paid with the sjambok, who have stolen the horses," said Koos; "come, let us be quick, or they will be beyond Maleuw's Kop before the sun is up! But stay, we cannot leave the Englishman alone! Here, Jan van Niekerk and Piet Wolmerans, you stay with the Rooi Nek, and if he tries to get away do not spare the clubs. Will you promise, Englishman, to remain where you are if I undo your legs?" he asked.

"I will promise you nothing, you scoundrel!" said a voice I knew well—it was that of my old chum, Hallimond. "Yes, there is one thing I will promise you, that if ever I get free again you shall suffer for this, you and your gang of cowardly blackguards!"

"Take that, you English pig!" said Koos, and I heard his sjambok swish through the air; "there is no time to give you more now, but I promise you when I return you shall have your fill. Do not touch him, you two, do not touch him!" he shouted, as he ran after his companions; "leave the English pig to me, and I will tame him!"

I felt inclined to rush out at once and rescue my friend, but prudence told me I must not; Basket had not yet returned, nor was Slim Koos out of earshot. A slight crackling through the bushes, and Basket stood beside me. A few hurried whispered words to Basket, and, creeping quietly out of the bushes, we advanced towards the house.

A light was shining through the open door. Two

men were sitting at the rough deal table, a flask of gin and a tin pannikin lay between them. Will Hallimond was in a sitting posture at the far end of the room, but I could see that, though on a chair, his hands were tied behind him.

"Drink to our President," said Wolmerans, as he pushed the tin pannikin between the lips of the defenceless man; "drink, I say, or I will push it down your throat!"

Hallimond turned his head from the cup, the man raised the vessel and dashed the contents in his face. The next instant, blind with rage and drink, these two noble patriots rose to their feet and made for their helpless prisoner.

"Come on!" I yelled to Basket, and, springing through the doorway, I felled Wolmerans to the ground with the butt end of my rifle.

The heavy cudgel came smashing down on the head of the other Boer, and without a word he sank to the ground. Basket had taken my advice and struck hard.

"George!"

"Will!" was all that passed between Hallimond and myself.

In a second I had cut his bonds; he stood up, tried to walk, and fell back into the chair. One of the men on the floor began to move, it was the one Basket had felled; any other man would have been stunned for hours, but a Boer's head is naturally thick. Basket raised his club again.

"No, not that," I said; "but come, quick! the ropes that tied my friend!"

He understood in an instant. Tying both men

securely we gagged them, then, dragging them to the stable, we pitched them into some loose straw, shut the door, and left them.

I returned to Hallimond. He seemed dazed. He told me afterwards it was from weakness, as they had half starved him; besides, he had been tied in the same position for two full days. I poured out a stiff glass of gin and gave it him, then, taking him between us, Basket and I hurried out, and as we crossed the spruit, and started on our home journey up the dark kloof, I could hear the rest of the party hallooing to each other, and gradually getting nearer and nearer to the house.

CHAPTER XXXII

I REACH MIDDELBURG

WE reached the cart, inspanned the mules, and made the best of our way to the top of the kloof. Arrived at the summit, we started at a rapid trot to recross the Olifants river on our way to Middelburg. There had been no time to talk or ask for explanations, but now it was different, and I turned to Hallimond, but either from exhaustion or fatigue he had fallen asleep, and to my enquiries all I could get out of him was: "Lucy, Lucy, how is dear Lucy?" and he sank into a profound sleep.

"Humph!" I thought, "I wonder who dear Lucy is? Surely he cannot mean—but no—of course that's out of the question."

A faint glimmer of light was showing in the east, objects became more distinct, the light broadened and broadened, and very quickly it was day. I looked at the sleeping man at my side. In spite of the deep tan that covered his face and neck he looked haggard and worn, as if he had had great suffering; he was no longer the sturdy-built, robust Will Hallimond I had known only a few weeks ago, and whilst I was wondering what could

have happened during that short time, Basket, who appeared to be ever on the alert, said quietly:

"Inkoss, they come! Basket hears their horses; they are still afar off, but still they come!"

I knew Basket's ears never deceived him, so I shouted to the mules, and we put on a spurt over the rough, uneven road. There were still some four miles between us and the drift. Of one part only I had any fear, it was within half a mile of the ford. Here the road passed over some rising ground, the country round was open, and it would leave the cart exposed to full view for a few minutes. Once over the rise and across the river I was pretty sure we were safe. So again I shouted to the mules, and we rattled smartly on.

The extra jolting awoke the sleeper; he yawned, rubbed his eyes, and sat bolt upright. He looked hard at me for a second.

"George, you're a brick!" he said, and a smile lit up his face. "I was so done up that I could not keep my eyes open any longer; but what's in the wind?"

"They're after us, Will," I replied, and again I shouted at the willing mules.

"Oh, are they?" Hallimond answered quietly. He stooped down, picked a rifle up from the bottom of the cart, and, slipping in a cartridge, a determined, set expression came over his bronzed face.

"You would not go as far as that, Will?" I said.

"Would not go as far! What do you mean? You surely cannot know what I have suffered at the hands of those devils for the last couple of weeks, or you would not speak as you do. Yes, George, if they come within

range of this rifle, I will shoot them like I would a mad dog, or I would rather let a mad dog go free than spare one of those brutes."

I saw that in his present mood it would be no good expostulating, so I let him have his bent, trusting that in his wrath he would not stain his hands even with the blood of the miscreants who were giving chase, though I had small doubt they richly deserved it.

At last we reached the foot of the rise. For the next few moments we should be in imminent danger, exposed to the full view of the pursuing party.

We reached the summit, and, as I anticipated, a shower of bullets spattered the ground all round us. A few more yards and we should be out of range. Hallimond was sitting behind me; I could not tell what he was doing.

"Hambarkai! hambarkai! hambarkai!" I yelled to the mules.

There was another shower of bullets, something sharp seemed to pass through the fleshy part of my right arm; it caused me to drop the reins for a moment, and, as I did so, I jogged Hallimond's elbow, and at the same moment there was a discharge close beside me, and with a sad expression in his voice he said:

"O George, George, I had drawn a bead on Slim Koos; you jogged my elbow, and now I have missed him. He is racing across the veldt to the bush that lines the river, and is sure to have us as we cross the drift."

But a worse fate awaited Slim Koos than the honourable death from a bullet. He had reached the bank of the river within a couple of hundred yards of the drift where we had to cross; almost as our front mules' feet touched

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the water—we heard a scream—then another—and another! We afterwards learnt his fate. Throwing himself off his horse, he had stepped direct on a deadly black mamba; thrice the venomous reptile struck at him; thrice the awful fangs of the terrible serpent had entered his flesh. There was no hope for him—there is none from the bite of that snake—and ere the noonday sun had crossed the heavens, Slim Koos had gone to his doom.

The rest of the party had no doubt gone to his assistance, for we crossed the drift in safety, nor did we draw rein to give the animals their well-merited rest until we had passed the Cobalt mine.

It was then I became aware of a dull humming sound in my ears. I knew Hallimond was speaking to me, but I could not catch his meaning, I heard the words: "Good God! he is wounded!" and then, when I came to my senses, I found myself lying on a green bank, Basket was holding a cup to my lips, whilst Will Hallimond was binding up my arm.

"Ah!" he said, when I opened my eyes, "I did not know you were hit, old fellow; why did you not say so? You must have lost a lot of blood; the bottom of the cart is covered with it. I think we had better remain here for the night."

"No, no," I replied, "that will never do, we must push on."

"As you will," said Hallimond, and after a rest of a couple of hours we again started on our way, Hallimond being the Jehu, and I lying propped up behind, whilst Basket, to whom it was as easy to run as ride, kept on ahead.

I fell asleep, and when I next woke the moon was shining through the trees above us, and Hallimond told me that we had passed both the Erasumus farms, and were well on our way to the last drift across the Seton river, after which we had a clear way on to Middelburg.

There was a ramshackle canteen on the south bank of the stream; here we had made up our minds to pass the night, and push on early in the morning, but though we arrived late, the news we heard there caused us to put up with all the inconvenience of a protracted journey, and push on without delay. It was none other than that the marriage of Du Toit, the Landrost of Middelburg, was to take place on the following morning, and Boers had been all day hurrying towards Middelburg from the district round to take part in the festivities. Hans Van der Merwe and a friend had only left the house half an hour before we arrived there.

"He is a fine fellow!" said the German owner; "he stood drinks all round time after time. It has been a good day for me, and yet some people say he is not a good-natured man."

Up to the present, except for the few words he had uttered when he fell exhausted from want of sleep in the cart, Hallimond had made no further allusions to Lucy, but I noticed how strange he looked when the loquacious German canteen-keeper spoke of the coming marriage. It appeared to me that an ordinary friend would not have taken the matter so much to heart, for he had not uttered a word since the man had spoken, but sat moodily gazing in front and driving the jaded

beasts as if they were not flesh and blood but pieces of machinery. I remembered he had said, "Dear Lucy!" Now, a man does not as a rule speak of a young woman to another man as "dear," unless there is something more than mere friendship existing between her and himself. This set me a-thinking.

"Will," I said, "did you get the note I wrote you on a piece of brown paper?"

He was silent for a moment, then his face lit up.

"Ah! yes, I got it. Ah! George, how can I thank you for letting me know such an angel?"

Then little by little it all came out. Lucy and he had often met. Each time he saw her he felt more and more that he could no longer live without her. News had come down from the Mozama river, for bad news travels apace, that I had been shot whilst trying to escape to the Portuguese frontier with two notorious gun-runners and a witch-doctor. The news had been sent by Hans Van der Merwe to Landrost du Toit. It was a mistake, he said, about my having been drowned on the Olifants river. He, Hans, had never sent the report to the papers; some one must have done it for a joke.

At the same time Van der Merwe had written to Lucy saying that she must make preparations for her wedding, as it was to come off in three weeks. He also stated that her guardian, Mr Leigh, whom she had met with him, was willing and anxious that her marriage should take place before his return to England.

"Leigh!" I said, "why, who did he mean?"

"Oh, a fellow calling himself George Leigh turned up in Middelburg; he told me he was a cousin of yours,

and that he had come out about a girl whose father had been a friend of his. He seems almost to live at the Landrost's."

I did not answer, and Will went on with his story.

"Lucy came to me, poor child! and told me all, and prayed that I would take her away somewhere, and put her with some good people, as she could not marry a man she hated, and she was sure the man calling himself George Leigh, who was so friendly with the Landrost, was no friend of yours. 'Besides,' she said, 'I hate him even more than I do the Landrost,' but she would not tell me why. It was then I asked her to marry me, George, and it was then I discovered for the first time that her attachment to me was as deep as mine was to her, and had been so for some time. But there was one thing she insisted on—that I should try and seek out the truth about you before she would consent to be my wife. I urged the danger of going away whilst she was at the mercy of the Landrost and the man calling himself Leigh. 'Never fear, Will, never fear,' she said, 'they cannot force a girl to marry a man she hates even in the Transvaal, that is, if she has a mind of her own, and I have a pretty strong one; besides, since I have you I no longer fear any one.' I started off at once to find tidings of you. I was waylaid about twenty miles beyond the Olifants river. You saw yourself how I have been treated; that was not a patch on some of the treatment I have received at the hands of those incarnate fiends. Luckily, Hans Van der Merwe's trap broke down several times between the Woodbush village and the Olifants. It appears the wheels kept coming off, and they had no screws to fasten

them with—that is what I heard one of his friends telling another man—or he might have been in Middelburg a week ago, and poor Lucy would have had a bad time. But now we shall soon be there, and as I am pretty well off, I shall be able to offer her a comfortable home before long."

Well off! poor fellow, to talk of being well off with his £600 a year as colliery manager, and she an heiress to millions of dollars! Should I tell him now? No, it would be too cruel at that moment; no, I would postpone the news.

"George," he said, "you sent her to me, and must know all about her; tell me all you know, there's a good chap?"

"Not now, Will," I said; "not now, another time."

"Very good, old chap," he said, "but it does not matter to me if she has not a cent in the world, for I am well off now."

It was nearly four o'clock when we passed down the silent street of the little village of Middelburg. Not a soul appeared to be stirring. We drove straight to the Standard Hotel, knocked up the sleeping stable lad, outspanned the mules, saw that they had their well-merited feed before them, and then, turning to the boy, I said:

"Go and call the Baas."

"He sleeps," was the reply.

"Go and call him," I said, "and be quick!"

The native departed, and in a few moments I heard a footstep coming towards the stable and a figure in a suit of pyjamas appeared at the door with a lantern in his hand.

"There is no room in the house," he said, "you must go somewhere else."

I stepped forward, and taking the light from his hand held it up above me, and then turned it on Hallimond.

"Good God!" said mine host, and he leaned up against the doorpost; "Mr Leigh and Mr Hallimond! Am I awake?"

"Wide," I said; "but show us a room, and not a word about our arrival to any one."

"The house is full," he said, "but if I have to turn out of my own room I will gladly do so to accommodate you."

"There is no need for that," I said, "but a little soap and water and some lint, and a shake-down on the floor will do. Never mind anything at present to eat; all we want is sleep. Mind, without fail, to have us called at seven in the morning. Come yourself, there's a good fellow! and bring my portmanteau, the one I left here. I have a lot to ask you in the morning. Good-night!" And in half an hour both Hallimond and I were asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE WEDDING OF LUCY HANTON

IN spite of the short space of time I had allowed for rest after the heavy exertions that had been put upon us, I sprang up immediately the landlord put in his appearance at the hour agreed upon. He had brought a portmanteau I had entrusted to his care. Whilst selecting some garments to replace the rags I had recently been clothed in, I questioned him closely as to what had been going on in Middelburg during my absence. He would have led me to talk about myself, but I put him off saying there would be plenty of time for that later on.

It must be remembered that he was quite unaware of my connection with the destined bride, and his conversation was full of the great event—the wedding of the Landrost to an English girl, whose guardian, a namesake of mine, was actually staying in the house. "Though," he added, "I don't like the man; he has such shifty manners. There appears to be nothing jonnick about him, but I suppose I ought not to complain as he has spent a lot of money in the house—I mean," he said with a cough, "he owes me a lot of money, which I suppose comes to the same thing."

"But the lady?" I said, "what about her?"

"Oh! from what I can hear," he replied with a grin, "she appears to be a regular Tartar, and does not seem to be over smitten with the Landrost. She has been staying at Carl Trichardt's farm for the last two or three weeks, and Mr Leigh goes out there nearly every day to see her. I have seen her twice, she seems every inch a lady, and I cannot imagine that she has the temper she has the credit of possessing, and is far too good for that boorish lout, the Landrost," and he said the last words in a whisper; "but I suppose it is a marriage of convenience; there are a great many of that sort in this country. But I must go and get ready Judge Haswell's breakfast; he wants it early this morning."

"Judge Haswell!" I said, "is he staying here?"

"Oh yes, he has been here for the last couple of days."

"Can I have breakfast at his table?"

"Certainly, Mr Leigh, and Mr Hallimond, too; he will be at the little table by the window, and breakfast will be ready in three-quarters of an hour," and the landlord departed to his various duties.

By the time appointed I had dodged round the corner to the village barber, had my hair cut, my beard trimmed, had tubbed, and was once more clad as becomes an English country gentleman. My wound had been dressed by Will, and as it was only a scratch I suffered little inconvenience. A boy had come to tell me that breakfast was ready, and I entered the dining-room, and went to the little table near the window. Hallimond had not followed me, but I expected him in a few minutes.

A slightly-built courteous little man, with light hair and clear blue eyes sat down near me. I bowed as he took his seat. He returned my greeting with a smile, and in a few moments we were chatting away as if we had known each other for years.

"I suppose you are going to this wedding ceremony?" I asked.

"Why, yes," he said with a strong Scotch accent; "as I am connected with the justice of this country" (here he smiled, and a merry twinkle came into his eyes), "I suppose I must put in an appearance."

"Well, *au revoir*," I said, "I daresay we shall meet there," and I left the room.

Hallimond had not yet put in his appearance, and, on making enquiries, I discovered that he had mounted a horse and ridden away; that was all the information I could gather.

In the stable-yard I was greeted by the grinning Basket who came towards me with no less a personage by his side than Kechima.

Loud were the expressions of joy on the part of the latter at once more seeing me. Had I allowed him, he would have aroused the whole neighbourhood with his extravagant singing of my praises, but I cut him short.

"Ah!" said mine host, who came up at that moment, "that boy brought me a ring of yours; I will give it to you by-and-bye."

"Thank you!" Then turning to the two grinning natives, I said: "Now for the mules."

"Let my boys look after them," said the good-natured landlord; but I assured him I always preferred looking

after my own beasts, and, followed by Basket and Kechima, I entered the stables. I closed the door, and then turning to them I addressed them in their own manner of speech.

"Basket and Kechima, you have done much for the mulungu your father, but yet you must do more." They both put their hands on their heads in token of submission to my will. "Very good!" I continued. "You know my waggon, that which the groote Baas Hans took from your father?"

"Yes, yes," said Kechima, "Kechima knows it. It is here, for so says Martinus the Hottentot, who lies by it: 'This is the waggon of the mulungu thy father, he that sent thee hither, and I would that I may see him again.'"

"So Martinus is here! now, that is good! Go thou, Basket and Kechima, go thou, I say, to Martinus, and say that thou comest from the mulungu his white father, and in token that thou speakest with a straight tongue give him this," and I put a sovereign into the hand of Basket, "and there is one for thee, Kechima, and one for thee, Basket." The two men looked at each other and would have shouted out my praises anew, but again I checked them. "The hour has not yet come for thee to sing. Go to Martinus, and say to him: 'Inspan thy oxen, and drag thy waggon up near the house where dwells the Heer Landrost; then turn thy oxen to the veldt, that they may feed. If thy Baas be at the waggon, wait until he goeth, but hasten to the spot thy white father would have thee to go unto, when he hath gone. Take but four oxen; they will do thy work, for

it is not much. Do this, Martinus, for thy white father, and he will not forget thee, and thy reward shall be great'"

"Inkoss! Inkoss!" they both said. I opened the stable door, they sped through on their errand, and my plans were now complete. But where was Hallimond? There was no time to wait. People were already hurrying down towards the Court House, where the first ceremony, the civil marriage, was to take place, for in the Transvaal the civil ceremony by the Landrost always precedes the religious rite. I had ascertained that the first function was to take place at half-past ten. As the Landrost of Middelburg could not perform the ceremony himself as one of the contracting parties, his friend the Landrost of Standerton had come over specially to act for him.

It was now ten o'clock. Carts filled with Boers, their wives and daughters, were hurrying towards the Court House. Thither I wended my way on foot, and was soon mixed up in the shouting, laughing, motley crew.

Du Toit, the Landrost, had stepped across from his house at the opposite side of the road, and, arrayed in a suit of shiny black, a huge white shirt-front, gold chain like a cable, and a white box hat, and surrounded by a crowd of admirers, was standing on the top step leading into the Court House. A man brushed past me, and mounted the steps by his side. They shook hands. It was Hans Van der Merwe, but in my change of dress he had not recognised me.

In the background, with a resigned expression on his

face, I caught a glimpse of my breakfast companion, Judge Haswell.

At last there was a buzz of excitement; the women jumped up and down in their seats, shrieked and laughed at each other, and crammed their handkerchiefs into their mouths. The men set up a kind of howl, which, no doubt, they intended for a cheer. A trap was heard approaching rapidly, and I also caught the rumble of a waggon's wheels.

"What is that devil of a Hottentot doing with my waggon?" growled an old Boer. "I will tan his red skin for him by-and-by." But there was no time to give a thought to Hottentots, for a Cape cart drawn by four black horses came whizzing round the corner. I knew them at once—they were Hans Van der Merwe's. It drove straight up to the steps. Dr Evans, in faultless attire, frock-coat, silk hat, lavender gloves, and patent leathers, sprang to the ground. Was there ever such splendour seen in Middelburg? Some one in white satin was handed out to him by an old woman who sat in the back of the trap.

I say handed out, for she seemed lifeless; she half fell into his arms, then staggered. Was she asleep? Was it Lucy? So pale, so thin, so haggard, with deep black rings beneath her eyes—those once bright blue sparkling eyes! but now they seemed dull, one might say dead, as if she were in a trance or stupor; but it was Lucy Hanton for all that! The supreme moment had come. I pushed myself through the few bystanders in front of me, and before Evans could mount the steps with his burden I had arrived there.

"Stop!" I thundered, "stop! This shall not be! I say it shall not be—I, the guardian of Lucy Hanton!"

"Who is this madman?" yelled the voice of Hans Van der Merwe. "Ah yes, I know," he continued, as I turned and faced him; "it is the Englishman who murdered the Bushman; the Englishman who murdered our good friend Piet Naude; the Englishman, the accomplice of the two gun-runners who escaped with them; but there is no escape now. Here! here, police! seize the murderer! Seize the villain! I know who he is; there is money on his head, I tell you; seize him!" and he made a step towards me, but a moment later he rued it, for my revolver barrel loosened his front teeth.

"You lying scoundrel!" I shouted. "Villain and murderer yourself, for your hands are red with the blood of Field-cornet Viljoen!" Again he advanced towards me. "Stand back, Hans Van der Merwe; stand back. Advance one step, either you or your friends, and as sure as I am George Leigh, a true Englishman, the guardian of the girl you would condemn to worse than death, so surely will you lie a corpse at my feet, or any man that comes with you! Look! this revolver holds six lives, and six shall fall before I yield it up! Listen to me, all you people; Englishman though I be, listen to me. There stands the murderer of your good friend, Field-cornet Viljoen!"

A deep murmur went through the crowd.

"The Englishman is mad," said some. "Surely he lies," said others; but not a few looked with grim sternness at the accused man, and said nothing. They were, no doubt, near relations of the murdered Viljoen.

"I am neither mad, nor do I lie, as God is my witness, and I will prove my words," I said. "This man, and those two blackguards—your Landrost du Toit and that rank impostor, the Englishman who calls himself Leigh, but whose name is Evans—would, for the sake of gain, have murdered me and my friend, Will Hallimond, had we not both escaped from them—for what? That they might enjoy the fortune of the poor girl you see there. Does she look like a willing bride? Look at her!"

The women began to murmur.

At the name of Hallimond a look of consciousness had come into Lucy's eyes. She looked hard at me for a moment.

"You are," she said, as if waking from a trance, "yes, I know you are Mr Leigh—George Leigh—my father's old friend—my friend! You spoke of Will Hallimond. Where is he? What has happened to him?"

She tore herself away from Evans and bounded up the steps to me.

"Do you think I am here of my own free will?" she said. "Do you think that? No, no; I tell you a thousand times, no! I was drugged—drugged! Look here!" and she tore the white satin sleeve of her dress as if it had been paper. "Look at my arm!" and she pointed to some slight punctures that showed on her delicate white skin. "They held me down, the cowards! the brutes! They—Hans Van der Merwe, and that scoundrel!" and she pointed her finger at Evans—"they held me down, I say, and then he pricked me with a sharp needle. He took it out of a

small case, I saw him; and after the pricks I began to feel sleepy. They waited until I was nearly asleep, and then drove me here. Even now I hardly know what I am doing, I feel stupid; but you will keep me from those villains, Mr Leigh? You will keep me until Will comes?" and she clung to my arm.

"Yes, yes, Lucy; I will protect you as I promised your father I would. There, Judge Haswell!" I said, as I took a paper out of my pocket and handed it towards him, "that paper will prove that I am innocent of both the murder of the Bushman and Piet Naude. I give it into your hands, as I know you to be an honest man. That waggon will show my right to the custody of this girl. Will you come with me that I may prove my words? If another man approaches within six paces of us, I will shoot him dead."

"What! my waggon?" said the astonished old Boer I had heard grumbling at its arrival. "Ja, ja," he said in derision; "let the Englishman look in my waggon if that will prove his words; but, Englishman," he continued with a grin, "if you are wrong, will you hand yourself over to me as my prisoner, that I may get the reward for your capture?"

"It is a bargain," I replied; "but the waggon is mine if I prove my right to it."

"Surely, surely, Englishman," he said with a laugh as he came a step or two forward.

"Then stand back—not an inch nearer if you value your life!"

My words had the desired effect; the people stood back on all sides, and Judge Haswell and I passed through.

In an instant I had dived beneath the waggon, and with a sharp chisel removed the thin piece of board that had for so long concealed my treasures. I presented the packet to the judge. He tore it open; a murmur of surprise went round the throng.

"As this waggon has proved my right to the custody of Lucy Hanton," I shouted, "that cart with its four black horses shall prove the guilt of Hans Van der Merwe and his accomplices."

Some half-a-dozen men rushed towards the trap.

"Do not let it be moved an inch from its present position," cried Judge Haswell in a voice of authority.

"It is all right, Judge," I said, "they are my friends," for I had recognised the burly figure of mine host of the Standard Hotel, and some half dozen hardy, rough-and-ready English miners, who had followed his example.

In the excitement of the moment I had forgotten Lucy, whom I had left standing on the steps, when there was a cry. I looked up. She was being dragged up the steps by Evans and Van der Merwe, and, to aid their endeavours, the Landrost of Standerton was waiting at the door of the Court House, book in hand. I rushed towards her. A horse dashed past me—for a second all seemed confusion.

"Neither you or any man shall ever have her alive!" yelled the voice of Evans. There was a quick sharp report; involuntarily I closed my eyes,—had he shot her? I looked up—she was lying folded in Hallimond's arms.

Evans was struggling with some half a dozen men, a smoking pocket Derringer still in his hand, and the body of Hans Van der Merwe lay stretched upon the ground.

Hans' fierce dark eyes were still open, gazing up at the sky; a small spot of blood was trickling from his forehead. Not a muscle moved—he was dead! Evans' bullet had found its billet, but not where it was intended.

The two Landrosts and De Kock slunk into the Court House and shut the door. Evans, still fighting, struggling, and cursing his luck that his small weapon could only hold one cartridge, was being dragged off towards the gaol. He being an Englishman, there was little doubt as to his fate!

The awful tragedy had scared the crowd; hardly a word was to be heard. The sturdy little band of Englishmen stood at their posts at the horses' heads. Judge Haswell mounted into the cart. In a few moments a crowbar had broken the hasp of the locker. Stooping, he raised the lid, and a moment later produced a packet of papers: after glancing at them, he said quietly:

"You are right Mr Leigh, the evidence appears to be conclusive. I shall take these to Pretoria, and you had better accompany me."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CURTAIN FALLS

EIGHTEEN months have passed away since that stirring day in Middelburg. A great many changes may take place in eighteen months, and a great many have taken place.

The tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl as Lucy Hanton exists no longer. She is now the stately wife of the new master of Selton Hall, her distant kinsman, and heir to that property—Will Hallimond.

For Hallimond had not erred when, on his trip to Middelburg, he had confided to me that he was comfortably off, for at that moment he was actually master of the old house where Lucy's father had first seen the light and spent so many happy days of his boyhood.

By the advice of my friend, Judge Haswell, for friend he proved to be, with him, accompanied by Lucy and Hallimond, I had started at once for Pretoria.

The various documents in my possession were so convincing as to my innocence of the murder charges, and the absolute right I had to the custody of Lucy Hanton, that even the corrupt officials of the Transvaal government were unable to procrastinate matters or to levy blackmail.

As to my complaints about the two Landrosts, the police, or any of their officials, they laughed outright in my face when I demanded that they should be looked after.

"No, no," said the official to whom I communicated my case, "that you have a right to the custody of the girl you have proved, but there is no law in our country that would prevent a Landrost or any other Burgher of this State from marrying a pretty girl if he can do so, and if she has money, why! all the more to his credit if he can get her, so take your ward, Mr Leigh, and be satisfied you have got her!"

So Lucy was duly handed over to me, and four days later in the little chapel of the Pretoria convent, in the presence of many of her old school-fellows, I gave her away to the man of her choice—Will Hallimond.

Little by little I had become acquainted with the many indignities Lucy had had to suffer at the hands of her persecutors. How twice she had escaped from them and been re-taken, and, finally, shut up in a room until the day appointed for her marriage to Du Toit. Then, on that eventful morning, Hallimond had been caught and made a prisoner in the same room that had confined her, as he was about to burst in upon them and attempt her rescue. He had escaped, as we have seen, only at the eleventh hour.

None of our old friends were forgotten. Kechima sits beneath the shadow of his own kraal in Natal, no doubt smoking his old bullock-horn pipe whilst he watches his wife hoe, sow, or reap the little mealie patch. Martinus drives his own waggon and team of oxen, and Basket is

with me as my chief factotum, for he would not leave me, nor was I anxious to lose his services.

I occasionally get news from Middelburg, for the landlord of the Standard Hotel is my correspondent. From him I learn that justice is still meted out by the two Landrosts, he of Middelburg and he of the Woodbush village, and, as the over-fined native grows each day poorer and poorer, their worships increase in bulk, importance, and riches!

Henri de Kock, the pound-master and auctioneer has become insolvent, and on the principle of "set a thief to catch a thief," he is now an energetic member of the secret police.

The fate of Hans Van der Merwe did not, as might be supposed, break the heart of his spouse, for, six months after the coroner, or field-cornet, had publicly stated that he was dead, she was married to the police-lieutenant, Grobelaar, and is now one of the shining lights of Pretoria society!

The evil doings of Van der Merwe were never made public. There are so many evil-doers amongst the Transvaal Boers and their officials, that it does not do for the pot to call the kettle black!

Of Judge Haswell I cannot speak too highly; but what can the giver of the law do when his hands are tied by a corrupt, tyrannical, ignorant Volksraad?

The evenings are still chilly, and as I sit in my little snuggery with Dodger at my feet, my big pipe filled with Transvaal tobacco in my mouth, the aromatic flavour of the weed and the glowing embers between the bars conjure up strange fancies and ideas.

Again I am crossing the veldt. Van der Merwe, Du Toit, the little Bushman and Long Piet, the crafty face of old Babijan, the streaming eyes of the old Majaja Queen, the fierce scowls of Prowling Leopard and Wildebeeste, the twinkling eyes of Solomon and the cool, cynical smile of the Portuguese—all in turn peep out at me. Then a little flame darts up to show a fair-haired, girlish face, with deep blue eyes. Again it vanishes. A crowd of men are dragging along a native; their sjamboks rain blows on his bare back. One more flicker, and, with a dejected, downcast look, I once more see Masoja as he drags along the thorn bush by his uninjured hand! Bang! bang! bang! goes the dressing gong—Masoja vanishes, and as I yawn, stretch myself, and prepare to rise, I wonder if he, too, like Kechima, Martinus, and my sinewy factotum who disturbs my reverie, has escaped from, or like hundreds of his brethren, still writhes Under the Sjambok!

THE END.

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